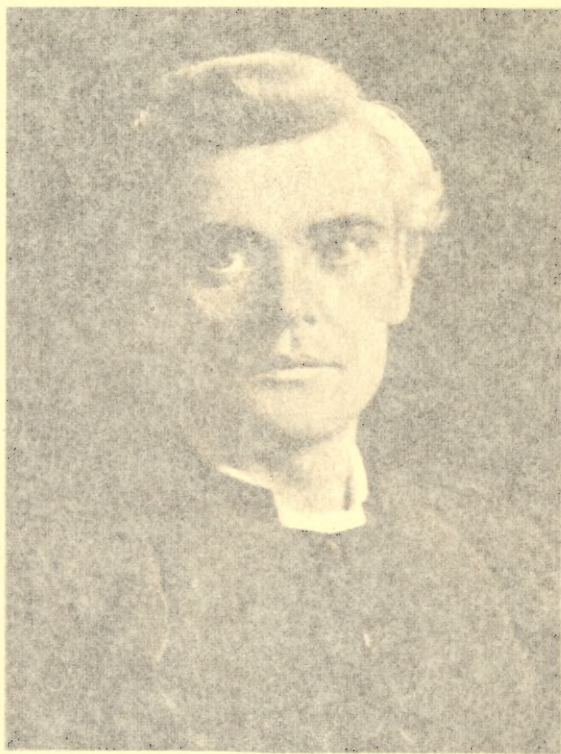


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Yours faithfully
R. J. Campbell

THE SONG OF AGES SERMONS

BY

REGINALD J. CAMPBELL

MINISTER OF THE CITY TEMPLE

LONDON

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A. C. ARMSTRONG & SON

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THE SONG OF AGES

“And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints.”—*Revelation xv. 3.*

I.

THE SONG OF 'AGES.

THE Book of Revelation is less a revelation than a mystery to the modern mind. Many attempts have been made, and some are still being made, to explain its purpose and its scope. None of these have been, in my judgment, conspicuously successful; and no doubt the greater number of my hearers are well acquainted with such attempts, and know how varied in character, how mutually contradictory they have been. For, the truth is, we have not the key to this book; we cannot understand its allusions nor its symbolism. Probably that was not so with the contemporaries of the writer, or, at any rate, with that portion of them for which he intended the special teaching herein contained. They would, no doubt, understand it, just as you would understand veiled allusions to current events in books or in the daily press of the present time; and it may be that some day we shall obtain the key to all this, and will know

something of what was in the mind of the writer when the Book of Revelation first saw the light. But at present, I say, it is not a revelation to us, it is rather a mystery. And yet it is not all obscure; there is a great deal of it illuminating and spiritually most helpful; and I have no doubt whatever that this mystical book is full of meaning from beginning to end, if we only knew what that meaning is in every case where a strange figure is employed or an obscure allusion made.

One of the most beautiful portions of the book for which we do not require any special interpreter is the opening verses of chapter xxi.—“I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . . And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” Here the writer is speaking in language that is perfectly plain and clear to any age. Our text is another of these beautiful and illuminating sentences, but its meaning is not quite so obvious as the verses I have just read. “The song of Moses and the Lamb”—whatever

can he mean? Well, we will see, for we will turn to the passages in Holy Writ, in which the idea is referred to. We will take the song of Moses first, and we have not far to look, for it only appears once in the Old Testament. You will find it in Exodus xv. It is the song of the great leader of Israel just after he and his motley following had passed in safety through the Red Sea:—"Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt Him."

Now to enter into the full significance of this song—one of the most magnificent odes that was ever written—you will have to enter into the secret place of the heart of Moses himself. We cannot do that in its entirety and as it ought to be done, but we are able now to measure and to estimate the value of the life of Moses as those who stood near him could not possibly do. For I believe that we have here a real historical character. I feel sometimes a little impatient with the theories that would explain away the men of mark out of history. Legends are spun around the names of men who are greater than the legends. I feel that

there is a forceful formative individuality here, the greatest driving power in the history of Israel—the man Moses, the servant of God.

Now, to understand why this song is put into his mouth, you must try to enter into his experience at the moment when it was first sung. This man of faith and courage has been leading a poor slave-hearted people out of bondage. There never was a more lonely figure in all history than he, and not one amongst his following could understand the greatness of the sacrifice he had made. “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” Thus Moses leaves behind him all the advantages of Egypt and the favour of its king; and for the sake of his “father’s God”—I like the phrase—he deliberately chose the hard way, the solemn way, the way of Jehovah, and now he sings his pæan of praise for victory granted. It could not have been but that he sang it alone; there was not another man in the whole host who was worthy to sing it with him. It says the host of Israel sang, I know, but, for all that, Moses sang alone, and I think the poet has really entered into the situation when he makes Moses say, “*My God, my strength, and my song. He also is become my salvation.*” For

this man, all alone, has wrought for God, all alone has he been chosen to be the deliverer of Israel, and even now he sings his song of triumph on the very eve of a long pilgrimage. For his probation is not over. I pray you not to miss this point. Moses is not singing in the promised land, he is singing on the desert journey, he is singing on the borders of the Red Sea, he is singing amid trials and wearinesses innumerable. Moses' hardest battles had still to be fought, yet he is singing, "The Lord is my strength and my song." This, then, is the song of Moses.

Now, what is the song of the Lamb? It is a somewhat difficult task I have before me in attempting to explain it; for the very phrase, "the song of Moses and the Lamb," has passed into our literature, into our devotions, and into the very affection of our heart, and I would not pluck it out. But what do you really mean when you use the phrase? I am afraid some of you only mean that the blood-washed throng around the throne of God in heaven, whose toils are over and done with for evermore, and they alone are entitled to sing that song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." And amongst them perhaps some of you will include the latest murderer who has paid the penalty of his crime, and died in the odour of a belated sanctity upon the scaffold; or the loathsome *roué*, whose flesh has reaped corruption, but

who has achieved an eleventh-hour repentance, and stands with Moses and the saints of all the ages before the throne of God singing, "Worthy is the Lamb!" If you do, you will limit the meaning, for that is not what was present to the writer of this chapter. He has a long perspective here. This man, who was in the spirit on the Lord's day, looks as it were from heaven, but it was upon earth that he gazed. "I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous." What he saw from heaven was what you and I are doing, and he describes the sons of God *on earth* as singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. True, it is the song of heaven too, but it is a song that is begun on earth, and only those who have sung it here are entitled to sing it there.

Let us see now some of the references to this in the New Testament. If you turn to St. Mark's gospel—the simplest of them all, the least premeditated—you will discover one most illuminative phrase in his account of the eve of the Passion of our Lord. It is this: "And when they had sung an hymn they went out." More accurately: "When they had sung a song." What was it? It was one of the songs of Israel, in which you and I have joined in this church. In all probability this was the song that Jesus sang on the eve of Gethsemane, and in the shadow of Calvary: "Bind the sacri-

face with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, because His mercy endureth for ever." Now, brethren, consider: twelve men were singing that song, and one that had been of the company was on his way with busy feet to betray his Master; and the other eleven sang as loudly as Jesus, we may be sure, like the host of Israel on the borders of the Red Sea; but, for all that, Jesus sang alone. No other could possibly sing that song and know what Jesus knew, feel what Jesus felt, do what Jesus did. August loneliness of the Son of God, singing His death-song in the shadow of betrayal and torture and death! This was the first note of the song of the Lamb that was slain; and yet, I say, though it was the first note, in a sense, it was not. The whole life of Jesus, the oblation that He made from the day of His call unto the day of His death, was the song of the Lamb that was slain, the song that was heard in heaven, and the song that is sung there now. Jesus began His song when He began His oblation of the life that was laid down for mankind, and still Jesus is singing that song, for the Lamb that was slain has not ceased His activity: He is going forth to the ends of the earth conquering and to conquer.

Now we will take these passages from the book

before us, and see what light they throw upon the scene. In Rev. v. 9 we read: "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us with Thy blood." The opening of the book signified the telling-out of the destiny of humanity, and you know in whose hands that is now; it is in the hands of the crucified, glorified Jesus. He it is who opens the book, and one leaf was turned this morning, and from the heaven which is not far away, for it is in the very midst of us, Jesus read out to-day the meaning of your life and mine. In Rev. xiv. 2 we read: "And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters." John was listening as from heaven, and the voice that he heard was not only there, it was here, singing, as it were, a new song. "And no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth." He does not mean that they had been plucked away from the earth, for our Lord's prayer had to be answered: "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." And, lastly, our text: "And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mingled with fire"—like the Red Sea—"and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number

of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the *song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb*, saying: Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints." So Jesus from His throne, and the saints around it, and the warriors on earth, join in one glad triumphant song; it is the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Now I am going to illustrate this. Human nature is capable of some wonderful things in times of stress. The song that is heard in heaven is the life of faith and love and of noble suffering bravely borne. In the early days of the Christian Church, as I need not remind you, men and women, and even children, laid down their lives for Christ and lived their lives for Christ in a spirit that is not too common now.

Any of you who have gone, as I have, through the catacombs will know that the note of early Christian worship was invariably one of joy and thanksgiving. These people never hid their heads in the shadows; they sang a song of triumph in the midst of tribulation, compared with which your life and mine is heaven to-day. Indeed, in all the centuries every time that a prophet of God has stood forth and the spirit has moved upon the face of the waters, that song has been repeated. A Sir Thomas More, going to the scaffold in the

days of Henry VIII for a faith in which neither you nor I believe, sang, nevertheless, the song of Moses and the Lamb. He had no bitter complaint to offer, there was no thought of self-pity in his mind, he went bravely and quietly to the scaffold without a sign of fear, without suggestion of pose; it was all one to him: earth to-day, heaven to-morrow, both with God. When he died he sang, as he had lived, the song of Moses and the Lamb. John Bunyan in Bedford Gaol—compare him with some of the servants of the Most High with whom you and I have to do at the present hour. A word of bitterness, of complaint, of self-commiseration? None at all, rejoicing only that he is counted worthy to be crucified with Christ. Let others pity, but Bunyan's life in prison and out of it was the singing of the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Now in history there have been other themes which are a counterfeit to this experience, and I must point some of them out to you. When the French Revolution took place, and a well-deserved retribution overtook those who held the reins of power in that distracted nation, it is said that the aristocrats died well, and none of us can withhold his meed of admiration for the men and women who went to the guillotine without showing a tremor in the presence of their foes. Day after day some of these men and women of the erst-

while privileged orders were kept waiting for the end; the gaoler came for his toll every morning—now seven, now nine, now twenty, now forty, as the case might be. He found these Royalists always gay, always ready; if he was one short of the number a volunteer would make it up. They went to the scaffold as smilingly, as serenely, as they would have gone to a ball. We feel there was something fine in it. So there was; it was “playing the game.” But there is something higher than “playing the game”; it is singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. I need only ask how these Royalists look alongside Bunyan, and the old-time martyrs, and Sir Thomas More, and you can answer the question. Take the death of Philip Egalité, Duke of Orleans—history has pronounced its verdict upon that long ago. Here is a man who, for the sake of his petty ambition and to save his own miserable neck, swears away the life of his cousin the king. They say that a wave of disgust passed over the revolutionaries when Philip Egalité mounted the tribune, and, leaning his hand upon his heart, said: “On my soul and conscience, I vote for death”—death to his cousin Louis; safety for himself. Retribution followed, but Egalité “died game.” Put him alongside a Bunyan and a More. The mood is different. In the sight of heaven the moral attitude is different; in the hear-

ing of the angels the song is different. It was not the song of Moses and the Lamb that the traitor sang. And yet I did hear, not very long back, that song sung at a graveside. It was at the funeral of a Salvation Army lassie, and I had been asked to officiate—why, I do not know. To my astonishment, those who followed her to the grave surrounded the coffin, and so soon as the service was over, and only the benediction remained to be pronounced, they sang together songs of joy and gladness. “Why was not that note always struck at the funeral of a saint?” I asked them. What was their reason for doing it now? “Ah!” said the friends of the dead—I cannot call them mourners—“because she would have wished it so; her life was so beautiful: it was itself a song of triumph, and we are only doing now around her ashes what she is doing before the throne of God.” Remember, her whole life had been a song—the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Here this morning there may be some good woman of whom the world has never heard, but whose time of trial has come. Calamity has overtaken her home, and she has to bear the burden of responsibility for the rest. The strong man, the house-band, as he has hitherto been, is crushed and broken; he has been flung by fate, a helpless bundle, at her feet. What is she to do? Oh, the

world would say, to "play the game." She has got something higher to do than that. The brave and cheerful face which she turns to the world to-day, and wears in the presence of her suffering husband, and with which she blesses her clinging children, is singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Here faith in love and God are triumphing far from the promised land. Some business man whom I address has come to the greatest trouble of his life. You have been in many a tight place before, my brother, but perhaps this is the worst of them all, and the hardest part of it to bear is that where you naturally expect most sympathy and support you get none. Your hearthstone is cold, your home is wretched, there is division where there ought to be unity, and you are misunderstood where you ought to be honoured. Be it so; you stand in a grand succession, and yours is a great opportunity to sing on the very border of the Red Sea, to which God has led you, remembering your yesterdays and your forty years' toil, the song of Moses and the Lamb. Here is a young fellow whose great moral opportunity has come. Hitherto someone else has had to fight for him, to bear burdens for him, to perform duties to which he was not called. Death has made a breach in the ranks; somebody has to step in and fill it, and you have come; and do you know what they are saying about you, just

the few that know? "Who would ever have dreamed he had it in him to play the man as he is doing now?" And you know how much it costs, and only you can know. But God knows, for you have entered into a magnificent succession, for which you were appointed to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, and the one thing that I wish you and all who hear me this day to understand is this: that for the purpose of the singing of this song heaven and earth are one. Do you suppose you have some forty years' journey to make before you reach the heart of God and the presence of the angels? We must reform our views of heaven; here is the throne of God in the midst, here the song is sung, here is heaven, all invisible, but its presence and power are felt in the experience of the human heart. Here or nowhere we can sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

The last time I preached in Free St. George's, Edinburgh, I noticed something which, I think, is somewhat exceptional in the arrangement of churches. The organist sits among the congregation. He has a little keyboard in a pew, and the great organ sounds above as he presses the keys below. Apt figure of the Christian's experience! The keys of joy and sorrow are pressed in every faithful human heart, and make harmony in heaven, whence it floods in blessing over the experience of humankind. This is the song

of Moses and the Lamb. You are singing it in union with the blood-washed throng whose conflicts are past, but you are singing it none the less really, because you are singing it as Moses sang it on the borders of the Red Sea, and as Jesus sang it in the shadow of the cross.

“Do lovely things, not dream them all day long;
And so make Life, and Death, and that For Ever,
One grand sweet song.”

THE UNRECOGNISED CHRIST.

"And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."—*St. John i. 33.*

II.

THE UNRECOGNISED CHRIST.

THIS text can hardly be profitably examined or understood apart from its context, and that context is strikingly and profoundly interesting. The writer of the fourth gospel not only had access here to a source unknown to or ignored by the synopists, but he uses it most carefully and skillfully. The section concerning the witness of John the Baptist to Christ is inserted in its right place, and it fulfils an easily-ascertained purpose. What was that purpose? It was to show, I think, that John the Baptist was not only the herald of Christ in the general, but also in the particular sense. If we are to believe the record that is given here, it is evident that John, to some company and in public—how large the company may have been we do not know—announced Jesus by name as the Christ, the One whom he had come to proclaim to the world.

Let us examine the circumstances. John had come into the wilderness of Judea, baptising with

water unto remission of sins. His message was, "Repent, for the axe is laid to the root of the tree." He announced the advent of One who should thoroughly purge His floor and gather the wheat into the garner, but burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." There was a general Messianic expectation at the time which you and I have often considered together. Israel was humiliated and weary. It was to a miserable age and a down-trodden people that John's message came. They were looking for a deliverer, a Strong One sent by the God of Israel. They may not have thought of Him as divine in the sense in which the Christian consciousness would ascribe that quality to Jesus, but they did expect a Messiah who would carry all before him, bringing in, as it were, the kingdom of God with a mighty hand, delivering them from their oppressors and from all the evil they had brought upon themselves. This was the burden of John's message. The fiery prophet proclaimed it with his whole soul.

Now observe, if tradition is to be believed, John the Baptist had known Jesus in childhood, and he was His relative, a comparatively near relative, too. They must have been well acquainted with each other, and yet he says in this chapter, "I knew Him not." Quite so. It would have been perfectly possible for one man to live near another and come under the spell of that other without

seeing all that was in him. When he says, "I knew Him not," he speaks with perfect truth. But the events which are recorded in this first chapter of St. John are the sequel of the great day when Jesus, the childhood's friend and relative of St. John, comes to be baptised of him. When the Pharisees put the question to John, "Art thou He that should come? Art thou Elias? Art thou the prophet?" His answer was, "I am not any of these, but only the herald of the Christ." In John's mind, when the question was put, there was a thought to which he presently gave expression. He remembered the hour, only forty days or so before, on which Jesus of Nazareth, his childhood's friend, came and asked to be baptised along with the penitents. You remember how John shrank at the request. *It was because he already knew Jesus.* "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" No new discovery this. Hence he shrank from administering the rite which professedly was undergone by the guilty who wished to enter into newness of life. The answer of Jesus was, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." John did not know what He meant. This was not the burden of the fiery prophet's message. But what Jesus meant was, Righteousness is righteousness indeed when it lays itself savingly alongside of unrighteousness, holiness shows itself in sympathy

with penitence. The Saviour and the repentant sinner are always near together. And the Jesus who went down into the water with John's penitents had no sin to leave there, no new profession to make. But He rose, as it were, in closest moral union with those who had now taken a new stand on the side of the righteousness of God. John saw something on the face of Jesus at that time which he had never seen before. I am not prepared to discuss here or to examine the phenomena which took place at the baptism of Jesus. It may have been that not a single soul except John the Baptist ever saw what is described as the Spirit descending like a dove and resting on Jesus. But what he did certainly see at that time, hidden from the rest it may be, was this—on the face of Jesus there must have been that look of lofty self-devotion wherewith the Sinless One went down alongside the penitents, the sublime sympathy of Christ. How could it be otherwise than that a heavenly radiance shone from that lovely face? And as Jesus ascended from the water and departed into the wilderness the Baptist, whose message was, "The axe is laid to the root of the tree," gazed on Him with a new reverence. "Surely this is He. I saw the Spirit of heaven in the face of Jesus!"

Between the two events which are recorded here (in Matthew the baptism of Jesus and in John the

proclamation of Jesus), had come the question of the Pharisees, "Art thou He that should come?" and John with the memory of what he had seen in the face of Christ answered with confidence, "I am not." But the next day Jesus came again, having in the wilderness worked out in His own Messianic consciousness the character of His vocation, the vocation which He well knew was His even when He went down into the water. He had gone to the wilderness to settle with himself of what kind His Messiahship was to be, and as He returned to Jordan again He knew after His forty days of conflict what He was to do. The look that John had seen upon His face he saw once more, and something added, perhaps, a look of solemn, heavenly dignity. It must have been there, whether it is recorded here or whether it is not. How could one like John the Baptist gaze in the face of one like Jesus and not see it? And so he says to those that surround him, "I saw the Spirit descending like a dove, and *abiding* upon Him, and yet until then I knew Him not." Yet all this time he had known Him! He that sent him to baptize with water—that is, God—and who spoke within the heart of the Baptist saying, "Thus and such is your message to be," the same voice spoke within Him again. "Upon whom thou seest the Spirit descending and *remaining*, He it is that shall baptize with the Holy Ghost."

This is the inwardness, then, of our text. But before we leave the exegesis thereof there is another consideration to be thought of. It is somewhat surprising that even after this, the great crisis in John's mission work, he should have had once more to question with himself. Was I mistaken after all? Is this Jesus whom I have known all my life, is He really the chosen of God? John has been imprisoned for his faithful testimony, and he is approaching the hour of his death. Israel can hear his voice no longer, and he waits and waits and waits. "When is He to burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire? Where is the sceptre, and where is the sword? If Jesus is Messiah I want to hear of something else than the lowly mission and a few healings and a new sort of kingdom. I want to know of Messiah riding to victory at the head of a triumphant Israel." So he sends some of his faithful few with this question, "Art thou really He that should come, or look we for another?" The answer of Jesus we have read together to-night. "Go and tell John the things ye hear and see. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have glad tidings preached to them, and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." There is one remarkable word in the answer of Jesus to the questioners, it is the word *again*.

“Go and show John again.” Why, when had he seen it before? He had seen it at Bethabara beyond Jordan, when he said, “I saw the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him.” It was not the miracles to which Jesus drew attention, it was what was behind the miracles. It was as though He had said to John, “Here is compassion, here is love, here is service—are not these evidence of the Spirit of God?” He is quoting from Isaiah lxi., as He had done already, in St. Luke iv., before His own people, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.”

We have now followed the true sequence of this series of incidents, and I have thought it worth while to dwell upon it so long for this reason. A man so exalted in character and purpose as John the Baptist, and who had lived with Jesus all his life—knew Him intimately one would suppose—saw and doubted, recognised and again hesitated; and the criterion by which most of all he ought to have known Him was one apparently by which he judged Him least, the presence of the Spirit of God and the tokens thereof in compassion and service and tenderness and love. These are the real tokens of the Christ in all time.

All through history this experience of St. John has been repeated. The Christ has gone and still goes unrecognised, oftentimes both by righteousness and by unrighteousness. Mankind is prone to be ruled by names. We think when we have described a thing in our accustomed everyday terms we know all about it. We do not. Jesus was careful never to use ambiguous terms in describing His mission and His work. He never employed even the word "Christian." In fact, that name, now an honourable name, was first given to the followers of Jesus in reproach and contempt by their persecutors. Be it never forgotten that the achievements of the unrecognised Christ are equally great with those of the Christ whom men have named with the name of Jesus. Jesus came to reveal the heart of God; He came with the revelation of what constitutes true righteousness, which is always incomplete except its final manifestation be love. Jesus came to set up the kingdom of God not in external institutions first and foremost, but in the hearts of men. The world will be changed through the lives of consecrated men rather than by the remodelling of institutions. Character first, and the rest will follow. Jesus never employed, as I have said, terms to distinguish those who followed Him from those who did not, but He spoke about moral and spiritual qualities, righteousness, truth, love, sacrifice.

Where you see these you have seen Jesus. They are the fruit of the Spirit of God.

When Christianity was first preached in the Græco-Roman world it came as a scandal to many well-meaning people, because it brought to mankind a new principle, one that was strange to Paganism, notwithstanding its great achievements. It was the principle of the cross. And what is that? The principle of *the suffering love of God at war with sin and woe*. This is the principle of the Cross. The Jews on the one hand were scandalised because no token save the insignia of shame had been given in vindication of the credentials of Jesus. And the Greeks were scandalised because in their view it were impossible for anything so repellent and so sordid as the figure of the cross to typify what was highest or to reveal what was eternal. "The Jews seek after a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto us who are being saved, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Remember, the wooden cross and the shed blood on Calvary were but the expression of a principle that was eternal. This was the last revelation of the heart of God and of Christ, the principle of suffering love. Yet some, as I have said, the very greatest and perhaps some of the noblest of the Græco-Roman world did not

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see the new and beautiful thing that had come with the preaching of Christ. When I was in Rome last year one of the most interesting experiences I had was in visiting the catacombs where these first Christians worshipped their Master. In those gloomy underground caverns the foundations of the faith that you and I now know were laid, or shall I say, the church, as you and I know it, was made possible. What heroes and saints and martyrs issued from those dim vaults to torture and death! And yet one thing impressed us all who wandered through those darksome corridors. It was this—the note of joy and exultation in the memorials of these early Christians took precedence over every other. On the martyr's tomb was carved the palm branch; never any expression of commiseration accompanied it, but always the note of triumph. It was something glorious to have been privileged to lay down the life for Jesus and in the service of human kind. That spirit is not dead, thank God. If it were, then Christ would be gone from the world. What struck me, as it has struck many people as strange, is this, that some of the blood of those very martyrs had been spilled by the order of one of the best of emperors. Marcus Antoninus, in the exercise of what he thought to be his duty, sent these people to death, not seeing what was behind the victory of the cross. It was wonderful that he did not

see it. He could not recognise the Christ, and it may have been that those who suffered under him did not see in Marcus Antoninus the marks of the same Christ, the tokens of the same spirit. Wonderful, that hidden from the eyes of the serious moral earnestness of the great Stoic emperor was the beauty of the Christ—yet not so wonderful. He was hidden, as we have seen, from the eyes of the Baptist, who came to herald Him, and who lived with Him all his days. Truly, the unrecognised Christ has done marvellous things in history!

Many times in the history of Christendom itself the Christ has gone unrecognised, even by those who have claimed to act in His name. There is no sublimer and no more tragic chapter in human history than the story of the Vaudois, the persecuted saints of the Alps, the heralds of the Reformation ages before it came. These poor simple folk, hunted from place to place amongst those rugged mountains, were almost extirpated, not once nor twice, by those who claimed to be acting in the name of Jesus. The very name of Christian was denied to them, now that it was no longer a term of reproach; but one with clearer vision, John Milton, one of the greatest of our own fellow countrymen, wrote concerning them—

“Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,
E'en them who kept Thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones.”

Why was it not seen sooner? Because Christendom, like John the Baptist, had not at first eyes to see the true tokens of the presence of the Christ. Anne Askew, whose name is written up on the walls of this building, suffered not many yards from where we are worshipping to-night. The tender limbs of this poor woman were racked and torn, and she yielded up her breath in the flame of fire for the very faith which you and I profess. And oh, the irony—some of you will say the blasphemy, of the time—before her dying eyes was held the crucifix, the dying Christ as it were reproaching the dying martyr. But did He? Ah, no! There is no mistake made in heaven. The tokens of the presence of the Master never were more evident. And yet it may have been—it may have been—serious, earnest men upon the persecuting side felt, as the figure of the Crucified was held before the eyes of the murdered woman, that the Christ was with them and not with her, Jesus, suffering, unrecognised.

Sir Matthew Hale, sitting on the judge's bench, in the seventeenth century, was approached by a poor working woman, who begged for the release of her husband, rotting in gaol. That husband was John Bunyan. And Sir Matthew Hale was the Chief Justice of the King's Bench, and a humble Christian. Oh, how little he saw what we see to-day in the inspired Bedford tinker! Like

the Baptist, his eyes were holden. He did not see his own Lord, but as a modern writer has put it beautifully and feelingly, "Long ago in heaven Hale and Bunyan have seen in one another the Christ that was with both of them all the time." Righteousness and unrighteousness alike have often missed the vision all history through. But our tendency has ever been to confuse forms and faith. It may be some of the best and wisest of us are making the same mistake now.

One of the commonest questions that is ever put to me, sometimes by those in sore trouble about it, has been this: "Here is one dear to me, an upright man, whose life is truth, who is prepared to sacrifice for the principles he holds dear, in whose heart compassion dwells and in whose conduct spiritual manhood is to be read. But, dear sir, he does not know my Christ. Do you think he is safe? Will there be mercy for him in the great day?" That such a question should be asked! What is it that Christ came to do? Have not I shown you what *is* Christ? "Go and show John *again* the things ye hear and see." He *is* these things. His is the spirit of compassion. His is the spirit of mercy, the spirit of sacrifice, the spirit of truth, the spirit of manhood. These *are* the Christ. The man who serves these is not against Him. Oh, for the heavenly vision that may enable him to recognise that he is already recognised of Jesus!

The thing to be done is to make men realise that salvation from sin is not escape hither and thither, into this circumstance or yonder environment, but in escaping the thralldom of sin and living to purity and holiness and truth. This is salvation, there is no other worthy of the name.

And we may make mistakes as to what are the marks of truth and what are not. God never does. Fidelity to the vision He has granted you to-day makes possible the higher vision of to-morrow. A man comes to me and asks, "Do you think you have retained your baptismal grace?" And I reply, "I know not what you mean. I know no grace that comes by mechanism. I know only of the grace of the humble and the contrite heart. Where this is to be found, there is the Christ, and with Him is the eternal life of God."

Another says to me, "Have you not, by your form of religion, deprived yourself of a great consolation, something infinitely precious, the frequent communion of the devout Christian who kneels at the altar to receive it?" And again I reply, "To him who devoutly seeks his blessing there, God has come indeed; but the real presence is not upon the altar but in his own soul. Where are righteousness and truth, where mercy and love have kissed each other, there is the real Holy Communion, and I can discern its worth. To enter into living relation with the living Lord is the

great achievement of all spiritual quest. Where Christ is, there is the Christ-like spirit, and "if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Not forms, but fidelity. The Lord lives in the heart of the man who has prepared for Him there a dwelling-place. I care for nothing but moral and spiritual values. Find me these and you can make your own forms. Christ cannot deny these without denying Himself, and where they are He is, even though unrecognised.

Now, suppose I address one man who has followed with sympathy what I have said so far, except just this, that when I speak of these moral and spiritual qualities as Christ, he hesitates and asks, "Is this true? Is the Christ who died on Calvary still alive?" Brother, that is my whole faith. I believe He lives because of the Spirit that descended and abode upon human kind from Calvary. I believe that He lives because it were unthinkable that that Spirit of righteousness by which you are living your life now can ever die. I believe that He lives because those glad tidings are winning their ever-widening way through the nations of the earth. Nay, talk not about Christianity decaying and about empty churches and faithless preachers, and so on. Show me the things which Christ brought into the world and I will show you the Christ. Churches may die; Christ lives.

And, my friend, it were better for you, and you would be wiser and nobler and holier and stronger if you could take hold of the hand of that living Christ, and make the venture of faith, and stake your all upon Him *by name*, as may be you have already sought to live by what is His. “Blessed is he that shall not be offended in Me”—

“Comes faint and far Thy voice
From vales of Galilee ;
Thy vision fades in ancient shades ;
How should we follow Thee ?

“Ah, sense-bound heart and blind !
Is nought but what we see ?
Can time undo what once was true ?
Can we not follow Thee ?

“Within our heart of hearts
In nearest nearness be ;
Set up Thy throne within Thine own ;
Go, Lord ; we follow Thee.”

WHERE JESUS FAILED.

“And He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.”—*St. Matthew xiii. 58.*

III.

WHERE JESUS FAILED.

SOME time ago I read the words of a New Testament critic on this passage. The view he took of its meaning was something as follows:—We have here a little hint of what possibly occurred many times in the course of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was not uniformly successful in His wonder-working achievements; there were times when He failed, and here is one of them. It is a mere hint, says the critic, but evidently it is the truth. Jesus required a certain atmosphere of sympathy, perhaps of credulity, and when this sympathy or unquestioning belief was withheld, He could do nothing very wonderful. The words of the critic recall a scene I once witnessed in the market place of a Midland town. A man fantastically attired was standing on a platform, with a brass band behind him. He was selling some quack remedy, and, in order to prove its efficacy, he offered to extract the teeth of any of the lookers-on. A long procession of

men and women was actually moving up to his platform and past his chair, each operation taking something like a quarter of a minute. The people all came down with smiling faces; apparently they had felt no pain; if they had given vent to any cries, the noise of the band had drowned them; and altogether this cheap-jack received a capital advertisement. Evidently the New Testament critic I have mentioned thought of the works of Jesus in somewhat the same light as the performances of this quack medicine vendor; not that he would put Jesus on the same level, but he was thinking of Him as a young enthusiast who believed in His power to work miracles. He had none really, our critic would say, but the people around Him believed He had, He believed so Himself, and consequently, where this mutual confidence was present, He could do some mighty works, and where it was withheld He could do none. Our critic is right in this, at least, that there were times when indeed He could do none, when His power failed Him. Whatever we may say of the miracles of Jesus, in this instance, at any rate, our critic would be within the mark in saying He was a failure.

We are not accustomed to think of Jesus as having failed in anything at any time whatever. Yet in a certain sense His whole life was a failure; even now His failures are abundant and tragic.

Why? Let us examine this particular instance.

The fame of Jesus had reached to Nazareth, where He was brought up, but in that Jewish village He had not yet attempted any mighty works, and He had never preached there. One day He rises in the midst of those who had seen Him grow up from childhood; expectancy is kindled; and they are not disappointed. For the attempt is made, at least, to do exactly the same things He had been doing in Capernaum. He went into the synagogue, and, as His custom was, stood up to read. This proceeding was not at all exceptional. Synagogue worship was different from Temple worship; in the former no priest was required; any man could stand up and offer to read the Scriptures for that day. Jesus turned to the book of Isaiah, and read those beautiful words paraphrased by St. Luke (ch. iv. 18-19).

Allow your imagination for a moment to play upon this theme. He read the words, as the scribes did not, with meaning, point, emphasis. Then He gave the book back to the minister, and sat down. The eyes of the assembly were fastened on Him, and He began to say to them, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." There is something omitted by Matthew at this point. They began by listening in astonishment, and bearing witness that He was speaking gracious words, but presently the mood changed, and they began to

say, as Matthew has it: "Is not this Joseph's son? Is He not Himself only a carpenter? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brethren James and Joses, and Simon, and Judas, and are not all His sisters here with us?" And they were "offended," or, rather, disgusted; they would not listen any longer. It was not because He was telling them gracious things that they repudiated Him, it was when He began to put His finger upon the sore places in their own lives. We can imagine the respectable fishermen and fisherwomen saying to one another, "What impudence! This man was brought up in our midst, and now He comes here and teaches His betters. Joseph has lived all his life amongst us, and never says an uncivil word; what a decent body His mother is! And as for His brothers, they have never been known to take upon themselves the office of hector, public teacher, rebuker." They were angry, turned Him out of the synagogue, and, as Luke vividly and emphatically continues, "led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong. But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way."

I think you will agree that this is a fairly accurate description of what must have taken place. What they resented in Jesus was that He took upon Himself to rebuke or exhort people

amongst whom He had been brought up, who claimed to be as good as He was. They refused to recognise what He really was, and, though they did not openly repudiate the truth of what He said, they were offended that He dared to say it.

Had Jesus any right to expect that these people should take Him on trust? I have read, or heard, this text expounded in this fashion. "Alas! here was the Son of God, with all His Divine credentials and His glorious Gospel, all He wanted was that people should believe, and they would not believe Him; they had closed their ears, hardened their hearts," and so on. But Jesus had no right to expect that they should believe. If He had come to them saying, "I am the Divine Son of God; you did not know it when I was in your midst working for My living; you did not see it when I was engaged at the carpenter's bench, and even now it seems incredible; but I ask you, whether it seems probable or not, to believe that before Abraham was I am, that I hold the keys of death and hell, that I am master of the universe itself"—what would you have done if Jesus had come to you with no better credentials than He had when He spoke to the people of Nazareth and had talked like this? We, too, most likely would have taken Him to the brow of the cliff and thrust Him down headlong. Perhaps we would not have listened as patiently and as

long as the little Galilæan audience did; for, as a matter of fact, these claims would have been unreasonable in the extreme, and Jesus never began to make them. What He did was to read this prophecy of Isaiah and offer to His hearers a higher life. Graciously He pleaded for it, and was drawing men to Himself by so doing, saying, "Follow Me; I am meek and lowly in heart; I will show you visions of God; I will teach you what the heavenly life means. Forsake the old ways; they are not worthy of you. Come, let us go together to the Highest." They were not prepared for that; they felt a certain resentment at His assumption of moral superiority, a certain jealousy of His moral worth. Nay, more; they repudiated them; perhaps they were angry even more at His rebuke, or implied rebuke, of the lives they were then living. If Joseph had kept silent so long, if Mary had never spoken, what business had this young Jesus, the carpenter, to come forward and tell them how to live? Let Him hold His tongue. It is not that He does not say what is true, but that He says it at all, that is the matter. Before we condemn them let us ask what we should have done in like circumstances. Jesus never put forward His pretensions; He simply put forward His glad tidings. If He came to-day in glory, with His legions of angels with Him, there would be no question, we

should all receive Him. You may be perfectly certain there would not be a word spoken against Him in the great metropolis. If Jesus, the King of heaven that we sing about, arrived in our midst, you may be perfectly sure that young and old, rich and poor, wise and foolish, orthodox and unorthodox, we should bow down before Him. But He does not come that way; and yet He has come. He is in our midst now; He has come to-day into the synagogue. You have seen Him; you saw Him before you came to the synagogue; you were face to face with Him in your own home. He did not come in glory. When He came with His glad tidings, with His offer of a moral opportunity, when His message was whispered to your conscience, which can be done without a preacher, there were no trappings, no tinsel, no legions of angels; it was just the issue between right and wrong. How did you treat Jesus when you saw Him? Because, in spite of the denial which I feel is already in the hearts of some I address, what Jesus of Nazareth stood for, that which Jesus of Nazareth brought to the world is pleading before the tribunal of conscience in the world to-day, and men are treating it just as then they treated Him. In one chapter of Miss Marie Corelli's book, "God's Good Man," the authoress makes a bishop of the Church of England speak as follows:—

"Many things appear to me hopeless, utterly

irremediable. The shadow of a preponderant, defiant, all-triumphant evil stalks abroad everywhere, and the clergy are as much affected by it as the laymen. I feel that the world is far more Christless to-day, after 2,000 years of preaching and teaching, than it was in the time of Nero. How has this happened? Whose the fault? There is only one reply. It is the church itself that has failed. The message of salvation, the Gospel of love—these are as God-born and as true as ever they were; but the preachers and the teachers of the Divine creed are to blame.”

I do not agree with the novelist, certainly not in the sweep of the statement. In her zeal and earnestness—for they are both suggested in the paragraph—she is unacquainted with the facts; the world is not far more Christless (curious phrase!) to-day than it was 2,000 years ago. If Miss Corelli knew what Rome was under Nero, she would have hopes of London, bad as it is. Christ has been doing mighty works which have not always been done on the housetop; His greatest victories have been achieved, the world not knowing. But it is perfectly true that there is failure somewhere, nevertheless. There will be a thousand thousand sermons preached throughout the world to-day, enough to make it a heaven to-morrow. But it will not be a heaven; things will be pretty much the same to-morrow as they

are to-day. And yet here stand I, amongst others, doing my best to hold up a glorious ideal. If I could make every man in this congregation do what Jesus in this Gospel sets forth for him to do, and invites him to do, what a London you and I might make between us to-morrow! But the transformation will not be effected; there will be rejection somewhere, and it will not be the preacher who will be rejected; it will be the Christ. Make no mistake as to what is happening. Will it be the Church that has failed? We use that phrase now till we have almost come to believe it; yet it is only half the truth—hardly that. We wear sackcloth and ashes, we worshippers, we Church workers. As though the failure of the Church could really hinder the Gospel of Christ! It can do so up to a point, but only up to a point. If failure has to be chronicled, it will be because conscience is obtuse; it is the Master Himself who has failed, because of the unbelief of both Church and world.

Let us examine what that word unbelief means: If I were to say, "I have just heard that Port Arthur has fallen," you would feel disposed to question the statement; some of you might confidently deny it. You would be justified in your unbelief; it is simply a question of fact—is Port Arthur standing, or is it not? You say, we will investigate the matter. If I am wrong, unbelief

is the proper mental attitude for you to adopt. But "unbelief" in this passage has no such connotation, no such significance. Our Lord was not asking them to accept Him as King of Heaven. He did not say who He was; He simply came with good tidings about God, with the message of Divine love; and then He did more—this was just where He failed with His audience—He required conformity of life to the standard He revealed:—If God is love, let man be love, too; if God is righteousness, let man be righteous; if God is purity, let man be pure. Man is not prepared for these things; therefore Jesus failed. Unbelief means want of moral susceptibility to the highest God has revealed. Unbelief does not mean the rejection of this fact or that, as concerning, for instance, Biblical criticism. It means the keying of your life to a wrong tune, it means that you have rejected moral opportunity, hindered and slighted the Son of God, taken Him to the brink of a precipice, and would have hurled down headlong that which came from heaven. Make no mistake as to the thing with which we are concerned when we talk about unbelief. It means faithlessness; that is the very word. We have no English word to translate this Greek term; the word that comes nearest to it is faithlessness. Whether you and I are living faithless lives or not, we need no one to tell us. If we have chosen

the lower in the presence of the higher, then we have rejected Jesus, and He can do no mighty work because of our unbelief. We speak about the failure of the Church; it is the failure of the Christ in the presence of conscience that you and I have to mourn. I have here a book by an author from whom I learned a great deal in time past—"The Revolution in Tanner's Lane," by Mark Rutherford. He writes with sympathy, pathos, and intensity, about the struggles and the sufferings of a class with which he was well acquainted. He introduces us to a would-be French Revolutionist, living in England before the Corn Laws were repealed, and it is the words put into the mouth of this man Caillaud that I now quote:—

"There have been many murders decreed by court according to law. Was not the death of your Jesus Christ a murder? Murder means death for base, selfish ends. What said Jesus—that he came to send a sword? Of course He did. Every idea is a sword. What a God He was!"

This speaker was no Christian, did not believe in the Christian creed; but he seemed as if he leapt right to the truth that lies behind every statement of Christian faith. It is what Jesus was, morally and spiritually construed, that has made Him God, whether humanity likes to call Him that or not.

“ He was the first who ever cared for the people—for the real people, the poor, the ignorant, the fools, the weak-minded, the slaves. The Greeks and Romans thought nothing of these. ‘ I salute Thee, Thou Son of the people!’ And Caillaud took down a little crucifix, which, strange to say, always hung in his room, and reverently inclined himself to it. ‘ A child of the people,’ he continued, ‘ in everything, simple, foolish, wise, ragged, Divine, martyred Hero!’ ”

There was the fresh utterance of an earnest heart and a noble nature concerning the failure of Jesus of Nazareth. But it was not the Roman soldiers that cried “ Crucify Him! ”; it was the people. Oh, the mighty works that have never been done that might have been done! But He is despised and rejected of men; whether He come in broadcloth or whether He come in fustian, men are not prepared for the standard of Jesus; He cannot work out His mighty work, and it is because of our unbelief.

Some years ago Mr. W. T. Stead wrote a book which he called, “ If Christ Came to Chicago.” He wrote it because he himself had been to Chicago and seen what it was. Chicago people did not like that book, and when I visited that city they told me so very freely and pungently. The reason was that Mr. Stead put his finger on a few sore places. They say he mis-

apprehended the case. Probably he did; however, he saw enough of the truth to make the reading exceedingly unpleasant for Chicago citizens. That book has given rise to other books, amongst them Mr. Sheldon's well-known work, "In His Steps; or What Would Jesus Do?" Mr. Stead was the true father of the question. Supposing now we were to put to ourselves the question, "If Christ came to London, what would Jesus do?" I repeat, He has come to London. Do not look for a Christ with a crown of thorns upon His head and Jewish garments on His back, standing, as He does in that Royal Academy picture, which has attracted so much attention, bound to an altar, the people passing Him by. I repeat, they would not pass Him by if they knew it was Jesus. He has made His reputation now, and taken His place amongst the world's prophets and martyrs, higher than them all. This Jesus is humanity's King and Lord. But this Jesus is in London, and failing to-day in the streets of London every time a public-house door swings open; failing every time a Christ-like ideal is rejected; failing every time a cowardly lie is told in His name. Here is a man getting on in business, and deservedly so. Those who know and love him best will say he deserves what he has got, for he, while his companions slept, was toiling upwards in the night; yet men are doing

all they can to destroy his little measure of success till he becomes established, and then watch the world fawn at his feet! While he is climbing they will have him down by fair means or foul if they can. He is good, generous, kind-hearted, conscientious; there is no question about these things. But listen to the version of his character that will be passed on by unsuccessful rivals. Good, respectable people, like that Nazarene synagogue congregation, will say all manner of evil against him. There is Jesus rejected, standing amongst His own. Here is a young lad in a business house who is expected by his fellows to fall in with their loose habits—to rob the public, to cheat his employer. Oh, not flagrantly—he must be too careful for that—but in all sorts of mean and dirty little ways the Ideal must be rejected, the selfish real must be adopted. He refuses; what is the result? They will make his life a hell; he must suffer for righteousness' sake. Well is it for him if he has manhood enough to resist the contagion of the atmosphere which he breathes. Jesus is rejected, and there is the unbelief about which I speak. Those who persecute the Lord Jesus must believe that it is worth their while, else they would not do so; they must believe it were better to be like what they are than like what He is, else they would not choose the lower. "He could work no mighty works there because of their unbelief."

Again, there is such a thing as Christian jealousy. You hear the expression, "He knows on which side his bread is buttered." An evil motive is looked for. If a man does what purports to be an unselfish act, the commonest questions are: "What is his game? What is he aiming at? What is he going to get for this new scheme or device or course that he has taken?" We are exceedingly glad to hear of another's misfortune. We find it easy to believe anything against a man who excels us, no matter what the cause of his excellence be. We carry self-deception so far as to believe that we are assailing a man's words or conduct, when all the while we are assailing his moral worth. We hear a tale about somebody; we say, "We devoutly hope it is not true." We mean we hope it is true. We strike down Jesus every time that we pass it on—

"To Thee our full humanity,
Its joys and pains belong ;
The wrong of man to man on Thee
Inflicts a deeper wrong."

Every man whose lot in life we make harder, every man towards whom we think or purpose evil, every man whose truth and righteousness we refuse to recognise comes to us as Jesus came to the Nazarenes. We reject Him through our faithlessness. The world is ever ready to applaud too late, prone to seek the worst where they might have eyes to behold the best.

Some of you are old enough to remember what I cannot—the passing of the Prince Consort—an instructive example of what I have been trying to enforce. To-day we speak in terms of respect and reverence of that great and good man who had the misfortune to be born in the purple. The day before he died the newspapers were shrieking their anathemas and venting their suspicion, and pouring their venom upon him—"the power behind the throne," they called him. Yes, it is true, we know now: Christ Jesus stood then beside the throne of England. To-day we acknowledge it, and we call that great and unselfish father of our King, Albert the Good. Why did we not see it before, realise that in the person of everything that is Christ-like Jesus stands in the midst? Your Christ, your Prince Consort, it may be, is with you in the workshop, in the office, in the home circle; but you have never yet looked at the truth as it is. It is not the vicious and the unscrupulous who suffer most. There are some men of whom it could be said, if they spent all their lives and energies in the service of the devil, they would not be half as badly treated as they are in spending them in the service of God. God's best servants must expect, be they humble men or be they placed like the Prince Consort, the penalty of faithful living, for the world is faithless. Choose which you will serve.

The world never gives, even to itself, the true reason for its hostility to the Christ. It never says in so many words, "I hate this man's ideals." Remember what they said about Him in Galilee: "Behold a man gluttonous and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, brought up in our midst! Do not we know Him? Hear what this babbler saith! He hath a devil, and is mad!" "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master and the servant as His Lord." Yet when the world sees in Him no beauty that it should desire Him, it condemns itself, it has lost its divine opportunity. This Christ, this Jesus of the New Testament is still here, with His good tidings and His mighty works. You will find Him in your home to-day. He will accompany you to your place of business to-morrow, and stay with you there; you will hear His voice in the warnings of conscience and the call of duty. He will put His finger on the sore place in your life and character and conduct. What will you do with Him? Upon the answer to that question depends what He will do with you.

"O, Lord and Master of us all,
Whate'er our name or sign.
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,
We test our lives by Thine."

THE DIVINE EQUIVALENT OF PAIN.

"I will restore to you the years that the locust
hath eaten."—*Joel ii. 25.*

IV.

THE DIVINE EQUIVALENT OF PAIN.

THE Book of Joel is one which Old Testament scholarship has found somewhat difficult of interpretation for several reasons. One is that it is all but impossible to fix, even approximately, the date when it was written; another is the difficulty of understanding the historical allusions it contains; and a third is that it is not quite clear, as it must have been to contemporaries, what the prophet means us to understand by the imagery he employs. But one thing seems to be fairly evident, and it is this: that the occasion which brought the book into being was a visitation of locusts which affected disastrously one important year in the history of Israel. The prophet describes very vividly what the effect of such a descent must have been. Any of you who have lived in a land where such visitations are at all common will be able to appreciate the force and vigour of the prophet's description: "They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war, and they shall march

everyone on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks. . . The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble, the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.' He seems to regard this army as the Lord's instrument for the punishment of His people for their sins. It may seem to us somewhat crude and unwarrantable that every calamity in history should be regarded as a mark of the displeasure of God against His suffering people; but it is not altogether without reason that some calamities have been regarded as a mark of the displeasure of heaven. Or, shall we say, that whether heaven be angry or no it is certain the sufferers of earth have deserved what has befallen them. The people of Israel appear to have been living in sin. The prophet is speaking of a time of moral decadence. Such times are all too common in the history of that people, as in the history of ours. He does not say just what was the sin that calls down the particular sentence, but he employs this descent of the locusts as a means of warning the people that they must turn from their evil ways, or they shall be stricken more grievously by the hand of the Lord.

We in our own national history, and even in modern times, have had more than one such event in which a moral has been pointed by speakers and writers. The most conspicuous I can think of

within recent years was the date of what was to have been His Majesty's coronation. You doubtless remember the shadow that hung over the land when King Edward was lying, as it seemed to us, between life and death, on what should have been the most joyous day of the year. In all the pulpits of the land during that week—particularly on the coronation day—the moral was pointed, as it might have been by the prophet Joel. From this desk Dr. Horton addressed a vast assembly of Free Churchmen, and told us that God was warning us by such a visitation that our national mood had not been what it ought to have been; and, like other congregations that morning, we accepted the warning with somewhat of solemnity and a feeling that it was to some extent deserved. We were all singing, you recollect, and singing with a new and deeper meaning, the lines of Rudyard Kipling's *Recessional* :—

“Far called, our navies melt away,
On dune and headland sinks the fire ;
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre !
Judge of the nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget ! ”

Whether or no we were justified in drawing from His Majesty's sudden illness the lesson we did draw, at any rate you will admit it was needed, and it did us good. The prophet Joel is doing here precisely the same thing. The people of Israel,

the light-hearted, easy-going, pleasure-loving people of Israel, as they seemed to him, had been living in the sunshine of prosperity; and all in an hour this enemy, rising from nowhere, darkened the light of day, ate every blade of grass, every flower, and every tree before them; and the prophet, taking proper advantage of the people's chastened mood, points the moral, concluding by saying, "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, saith the Lord." He goes further; he tells them of a greater blessing that is waiting, but it depends upon themselves whether it is to be received:—"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered."

In the history of Christendom a curious use has been made of this passage. I doubt not that it would interest some of you who are not well acquainted with the literature of the early years of Christianity if you could just turn up some of the fathers and see what they say about this chapter, and particularly with reference to the figure of the locusts. They tell us in all solemnity that what was meant here by the prophet Joel's figure of the locusts was that assaults were to be made by heresy and persecution upon the well-being of the Church of God, but she was to come victorious out of the times of stress and storm; and they, therefore, quoted verse 28, as pointing to the complete and final triumph of that church—"It shall come to

pass afterwards that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh. . . . And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth. . . . And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." I do not blame these old scholars and saints of antiquity for the use they made of this chapter, for the prophet himself allegorised, and it is difficult to see where actuality ceases and allegory begins. But we know that the Apostle Peter on the ever memorable day of Pentecost made free use of this historic chapter. On that day, when a vast multitude was gathered to listen to the simple Galilæans telling what was then a new story to the world, but is now the old, old story to us, this was the defence made by their leader: "These are not drunken, as ye suppose; this is but the fulfilment of the word that is spoken by the prophet Joel. It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. . . . And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

We are then entitled to do what the Apostle Peter and the Fathers of the Church and the prophet Joel himself have all done with the imagery of this chapter. We can spiritualise it as they did, for beneath every simplest figure there is

a profound spiritual meaning. I take it that the spiritual meaning of our text is this: God brings forth from all pain a spiritual somewhat for the sake of which the pain is sent. There is no waste, no wanton sacrifice, in the experience of men; all human sorrow is the substance from which God is fashioning holy joy. Every pang of suffering is the material of gladness. Suppose we could put ourselves in the place of the people who heard Joel speak these words for the first time; it is an exercise worth attempting. Doubtless in that primitive group—it could not have been much larger than a group that heard the prophet speak—there would be many people who felt they had lost everything; and in utter despair they came, as people do when they are brought low, to the man who spoke as from the unseen. I do not know how they would receive Joel's message; I cannot tell how deep it went—no indication is given. But try to put yourself in the place of those who heard it: would it not have meant more to you, possibly, than it seems to mean to us as we read it to-day? You have lost everything; the locusts have been the means of its destruction. Yet God says, "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." Nay, more; God has a larger, richer blessing waiting in the background—the locusts are but His instruments to call your thoughts toward it. "And it shall come to pass that everyone that

shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." Now, try further to put yourself in the place of the multitude surging in the streets and squares of Jerusalem, and listening to a plain-clad fisherman on the day of Pentecost; think that you are of this Jewish-Roman multitude. It was a sad time; men's hearts were weary, there was no open vision. It was a time when religion was on the decline, as some people declare it is now, when all beliefs were going into the melting-pot, and the world was full of restlessness and misery and woe. Then it was that Peter stood out with beaming face, and declared with an accent that the world had never listened to before: "These are not drunken, as ye suppose; this is what was prophesied by the prophet Joel; the spirit of the Lord is poured out upon all flesh; this is the great and wonderful day of the Lord. Repent, every one of you, and ye shall receive remission of sins. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Unless I am utterly at fault in my judgment, you and I would have stood spellbound like the rest, for this would have been exactly the tidings that we should have been longing to hear. Do I ask too much if I say, Listen to me (as if I were the leader of the Galilæans, or even as if I were that simple, far-off, shadowy figure whom we name the prophet Joel), and I will utter in your

hearing the words of my text as though they came indeed as a spiritual message from the heart of God, and we will try to see what they mean?

“I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.” In the congregation this morning there may be many who have come to this place in woe and wretchedness because of the years that the locust hath eaten. Here are men conscious of vain regrets; if the regrets had not been there, it may be you would not have been here. So many of us are spendthrifts in youth, beggars in age. It is not only those that spend their money of whom that proverb holds true. It holds true of everyone of us in some degree. We are well acquainted with the loss of the years that the locust hath eaten. Take, for example, that young rake of whom the world speaks half pityingly, half contemptuously, who has wasted his substance in riotous living. We have heard so many morals pointed concerning the prodigal, and his figure has passed into so many proverbs, that you wonder, do you not, that there ever should be a prodigal or a profligate left to-day? Why, the lesson of yesterday was so hard and so sad that one would think there would be no more fools left to trifle with their youth. But there is an old saying, “If youth only would, if age only could.” With the regularity of a law, a menacing, terrible one, comes the tale of ruined lives. Those prodigals you know to-day will be

followed by others to-morrow. Amongst your sons and your sons' sons there will be some who live over again the grim and painful experience of the man who has wasted his substance, and finds that it is given not again. When you and I meet to talk over our friends of years ago, how often does the pitying sentence rise to our lips, as some one's name emerges in the conversation, "Alas, poor fellow, I remember, I remember—but he went wrong, you know, years ago." Or, as I heard but a few days since, a pathetic sentence is uttered as a personal experience from one such; said a young man of whom I know but very little, "My life was over at twenty-eight; my golden days are in the past." For such as these, who have wasted substance, squandered opportunities, flung away from them the very constitution that God gave them, what is there to look forward to? What is there indeed? Only the years that the locust hath eaten.

How easy it is to point the moral! The accounts of ruined lives of course and obviously are the very material with which to point the moral; but what about the other men and women in the pew this morning of whom the same thing holds true—that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap? There are many of us who have had a fair measure of what the world calls success; you have been contented, it may have been, with a modest amount of it. Do you know anything of the years that the

locust hath eaten? Have you prosperous ones no vain regrets? Have you no yesterdays that it is pain to remember? Have you forgotten the mistake that you made years ago in the time of your folly, when you spoke a word that to-day you would give half you possess to recall? Have you forgotten that hasty choice? Have you thought upon the act which through guile or malice or thoughtless selfishness or evil pride you perpetrated? What has it cost you? Years of regret, dark hours of pain when the sun was darkened and the stars withdrew their shining. Oh, those years that the locust hath eaten! Is it not true, my friend, that evil fate seems as though it can be too easily invoked? We shut ourselves up to a destiny when, if we could only see our to-morrow, how differently we would choose! It does seem oftentimes with us, as with Cain, that our act of murderous violence has pierced our own soul, and our punishment is greater than we can bear. I have a great sympathy with any man in this congregation this morning who feels almost as if he had been betrayed into the worst and most ruinous action of his life; he did it, not seeing what lay beyond. Now behind and before there stretch for him the years that the locust hath eaten.

Nor does the prophet's word apply only to these. I am perfectly certain that up to now I have covered the whole congregation, young and old.

It is true, for the very youngest is perhaps preparing his years that the locust shall eat, and the eldest here knows well about them. But what of those to whom calamity has come unbidden and undeserved? You and I, in our joy at the advent of springtime, I doubt not have been taking our way into the country, watching the nascent life and listening to the singing of the birds. Did you notice yesterday in your walks the tree that stands black and gaunt and bare, while all its neighbours are verdure-clad? What has happened? One shaft of lightning in one deadly moment has robbed that tree of all springs and summers to come. There are people in our company at this moment mingling with us in our songs and joining with us in our prayers, but alas! for them the tender grace of a day that is dead will never come back. All in a moment, as it seemed, some dreadful truth, some malignant change has come like a bolt from the blue; and before them now, though they are not to blame, there are but the years that the locust hath eaten. Have you ever been tempted, dear friend, into the borderland of the desperation of Job's wife, "Curse God and die"? Well, now listen to me, all of you. Those whom I have described this morning constitute a spiritual problem by themselves, older than their generation, older than the generation to which Joel spoke. What am I to say about them? This, and I say it

with the greatest deliberateness, weighing well my words: All pain, whether deserved or undeserved, is God's accumulating blessing in His Divine purpose, and it has its spiritual equivalent in the deeper life that is one with His own. No man can suffer except God be with him. Pain is no mark of the displeasure of heaven, but just the contrary. It is the summons to come up higher; it is the reminder of our kinship with the eternal joy that is wise with the pain that lies at the heart thereof. To know what that joy is—the joy of the Lord—you must know what pain is—the pain of Christ. All agony is redemptive, both for your own soul and for mankind. You endure in, with, and for God; in, with, and for humanity; and without suffering you cannot know the meaning of the life of which all—saint and sinner alike—are in search. Yesterday and the day before I followed my gardener round the walls pruning the fruit trees. I might have put to him this question, "What are you doing with that pruning knife in your hand?" The heap of wood, living and dead, was increasing at his feet, and in my inexperienced judgment it would seem as if some great waste were going on. But if I had put the question this would have been the reply, "I am removing that which is false growth; I am removing death to make life; for every stroke of this knife you shall have the equivalent in blossom and fruit—the precise equivalent.

That which is to be and is not yet is prepared for in what is taken away." Years past I remember going in the Black Country to a manufactory of art pottery. Amongst other mysterious things was shown to me the room wherein patterns were painted on the ware before the application of the heat which made the pattern a part of the substance itself. Then I went through the place where the burning process was going on, where what had been designed in a quiet room at the top of the building was being burnt into the very fabric of the vessels, which were to be things of beauty. My guide showed me one in which the picture was marred. I said, "What is wrong? It does not seem like the rest."

"That needs yet a little burning," he said, "it would have been worth while to have had a little more. You would have had its equivalent in beauty." Apt figure! "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." Every unit of pain has its equivalent in the purpose of God. I wonder what it is that the hand of the omnipotent artist has painted on your heart, and has worked there with the refiner's fire. Again, some of us this very morning have made use of a hotel lift; have you ever thought that the height to which it raises you is the precise equivalent in foot pounds of pressure downward upon a tiny column of water? As is the pressure, so is the result. When I was

a very little fellow I remember that for a childish fault my pocket money was taken from me by someone who loved me. I thought it was gone for ever, and for me that meant merely what it represented in joy, for I had set my little heart on something I thought worth while. By-and-bye the heart that robbed me of it gave it back again. It was not the money that came, it was its equivalent, and there was a usury too, and that usury was the lesson I had learned. There came back to me what I needed most, and rejoiced most over, and there came to me a knowledge of how it was done. This is the kind of partnership into which we are entering with God. There are no mistakes in the Divine economy. We say, in our rough-and-ready parlance, in our superficial acquaintance with life, "What a man sows he reaps." Precisely, and why? Because God loves. "Whom He loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." By pain we enter into a fellowship with the father and mother heart of the universe that were well worth the price. "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." Then, beloved, be glad that you can suffer; pity the man who has yet to learn how. I went down a gold mine in Colorado, and someone gave me a piece of quartz, such as was piled on wagons before me; not much gold could I see in that ugly piece of rock. But we knew it had to be broken up and

quarried small, and smelted in a fierce heat; and then we should have what we sought. There are men of your acquaintance and mine—perhaps we have been of the number—who have had to be broken from their selfishness and their base contentments, and to pass through the refiner's fire that the purpose of God might prevail in them. Of the sinner the promise of our text is true, of the saint it is true, even of the Son of God it is true. Jesus was made perfect through sufferings, endured the Cross, despising the shame for the joy that was set before Him. Of the mystery of redemption it is true. Redemption cannot begin till a way for God's will has been prepared in human heart. Paul speaks of deliverance from sin as dying with Christ, and of the conscious choice of the ripened saint as being crucified with Christ, and beyond both experiences, what? "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." "What are these that are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they? These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

THE BURNING OF THE TARES.

"As the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world."—*St. Matthew xiii. 40.*

V.

THE BURNING OF THE TARES.

OUR Lord's custom of teaching by parable was one which was well suited to the mental habit of the simple Oriental audiences He addressed. They were used to it. They expected it. Other teachers did it. Oriental teachers do it now, yet no one ever used this method so sweetly and felicitously as Jesus. For His parabolic teaching is equally at home in East or West. Very precious unto many of us are some of the simple stories that Jesus told. How could we dispense, for example, with the three in St. Luke xv., the Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Silver, the Prodigal Son? But the Gospel that records most of these picture sermons is St. Matthew, and in this chapter in particular there are several which have taken hold upon the imagination of Christendom, the Parables of the Sower, of the Tares, of

the Mustard Seed, of the Leaven, of the Hidden Treasure, of the Pearl, of the Draw Net cast into the sea. All these picture lessons Jesus taught to an audience of simple men and women under an eastern sky. I have said it was a method they would well understand, but not everybody understood. Several times in the course of this chapter Jesus reminds His audience that it is so. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." When alone with His disciples He reminded them that no doubt there were among His auditors those who heard without hearing, those who came idly to listen to the peerless teaching which was to change the face of the world and men's thought and action for all time, and went away as though they heard it not. There were a few who wanted to know. Of these Matthew was one. When they were alone they asked Jesus to explain the public teaching. The explanation He gives of the Parable of the Tares is noteworthy. While we were reading it this evening I dare say many of you may have thought that a little expansion even with the explanation would not have been out of place.

The Gospel of St. Matthew draws upon several sources, the chiefest of them being probably Matthew's own notes of what he had heard Jesus say. It has been said that St. Matthew has the least spiritual imagination of all the evangelists.

St. John—if it be that St. John writes the Fourth Gospel—expands to such a point that we feel we have lost something of the simplicity and the sententiousness of the teaching of Jesus. Not so St. Matthew. All that he records or nearly so are epigrams. He took notes to some purpose, when he put down the Beatitudes, for example: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” Every one of these may have been the heading of a discourse, or the title of it, as I gave you mine just now. Matthew put that down for himself, perhaps never imagining that it should be a famous book. Then other hands added incidents in the life of our Lord, drew upon contemporary sources for descriptions of what He said and did, probably true, too, and they were put together, and we have St. Matthew’s Gospel.

Now I think it not unlikely that St. Matthew tells the Parable of the Tares himself in a few sentences, and the explanation was put in by someone else who had heard it from those who received it from the lips of Jesus. The explanation might have done with a little addition, and yet where would have been the necessity of the addition after Jesus had spoken to those who had ears to hear? He is speaking so even now, and in this assembly

to-night there are some who will hear the voice and there are some who will not.

Before we proceed to an examination of what I think to be the spiritual lessons, the fundamental principle that this our text declares, I want you to examine three words in it. The three words are—the tares, the world, and the fire. To these three we may add a fourth, which is not in the text—the angels, who or what are they?

The tares. “While men slept the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.” Someone who has been to the Holy Land recently by an excursion, with which I expected myself to go, brought back to me as a present it was thought I should appreciate, and I certainly do, a collection of the flowers of Galilee, from which Jesus drew his figures, and almost the last specimen in this book of Flower Life in the Holy Land was the tares. I was surprised when I found that the tares were almost like the wheat. I am certain that none but farmers could have detected that the tares were not wheat. I am told the difference can only be discerned by the inexperienced at the harvest time. Then, the tares fail to look like the full corn in the ear. Jesus is speaking here evidently of a vicious something designed to mar the goodly harvest. What is it? Well, hear His explanation. “The field is the world. The good seed are the children of the kingdom. The tares

are the children of the wicked one.” It seems very simple, but does Jesus mean that the wicked one, whoever he is, created bad men and brought them into the world on purpose to spoil the destiny of the good? That could not be His meaning. There is only one Creator, whether there be a personal power of evil or no. Creatorship does not rest with an evil one, but with God. No, that is not all Jesus has to say about it. “The Son of Man shall send forth His angels and shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend (cause to stumble, or, literally, all the scandals), and they that do iniquity.” It is plain, then, that by the tares Jesus means every principle of evil, every occasion of wrong, every seed of foulness, hideousness, loathsomeness, in human nature or experience. He means *things* to begin with, but not only so, He means *men*, the men that cause these things are included with the tares, the men whose characters are a compound of all the things that do offend are counted as of the things that work against God. Read the sentence again—“Shall gather out of His kingdom all the things that do offend, and they that work iniquity.” These are the tares, the things and the men who are on the side of evil. Mark, I have just said that there may be, or there may not be, a captain of the host of evil. But we can scarcely think about evil at all as a principle, antagonistic and inimical

to human life, without thinking of it under the figure of a personality. For my own part I fail to see why there may not be a captain of the host of evil. It is consistent with omnipotence that there should be. We act as one another's devils often enough, and there is room for larger viciousness than you and I have ever had any opportunity or power to display. Yet God reigneth. The fruit, then, of the personalised power of evil, whether it be things or men, Jesus terms the tares.

Now, what am I to say as to the world? It will be no news to those present who are acquainted with their Greek Testament that in this parable of the Tares there are two words for "world" that are translated in the English by one. Listen and I will read you the two separately. "The field is the 'world.'" The Greek word for that is *κόσμος*. "As the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the 'world.'" The word for that is *αἰών*. They do not sound alike, do they? Do you suppose that Matthew made a mistake when he used the two words instead of one for ideas which the English translators thought to be so nearly identical as to be translatable by one? No, I am sure he did not. If he said *κόσμος* he meant *κόσμος*. If he said *αἰών* he meant *αἰών*. The latter word is equivalent to one with which you are all familiar, æon, a vague period of time, age, if you will. Thus when Jesus

speaks of the "world" in our text He is not speaking of the *κόσμος*, that is, the great universe of stars and suns, and mountains, and trees, and flowers, and men, and women, and little children. He is speaking of this age, any age, yours, mine. "So shall it be at the consumation of the age," the winding up, the gathering of effects from causes, the consummation of a process, whatever it may have been.

Thus our text says, "As the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this age." What are we to say is the meaning of the fire? Those of you who have your Bibles, turn with me to a few illustrative passages, and we shall discover something. It is a favourite figure of both Old and New Testaments to express or to describe God's cleansing judgments upon men and nations. In Isaiah lxvi. you will read, "With fire and sword will God plead with His people." Turn to the Book of Malachi, the one which immediately precedes Matthew, and we find there something even more suggestive still—in the third chapter, at the first verse: "Behold I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me. And the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in. Behold He shall come, said the Lord of Hosts. But Who shall abide the day of His coming, and who shall

stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire." Turn now to St. Matthew iii., the book that follows this remarkable statement which was evidently in St. Matthew's mind when he gave us his description of the work of the Baptist, verse 11, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Jesus and fire, the refiner's fire! Turn now to St. Luke xi., 39: "I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what if it be already kindled?" Who is the speaker? The gentle Jesus. And He spoke truth then, irresistible, unmistakable, if ever He did so in parable or without. Turn to 1 Corinthians iii., 13, and let us read together once more. "If any man build upon this foundation [Jesus Christ] gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it." "And the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." Turn now to Hebrews i. "He maketh His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire." Better still, "He maketh His angels sweeping winds, his ministers a flame of fire."

This introduces us to the fourth word of which

I spoke. Who or what are the angels? God's instruments, God's means. God's messengers, the bringers of God's judgments. God's angel occasionally in time past has been the guillotine, God's angel has been the barbarian who stood with fire and sword at the Christian's gate, God's angel has come as plague, pestilence and famine to a guilty nation, God's angel to you and to me has been the angel of judgment we individually know and need no man to tell us of, when we were tested by Him whose angels are sweeping winds and His ministers a flame of fire. Brethren, if Jesus really found ears to hear Him and to understand, and He must have done or there would have been no Christianity, what a wonderful teaching this was, this parable of His, in which He spoke of God's dealings with institutions and nations and men!

For we have illustrations of it ready to our hand. We could take a thousand from what the men and women in this congregation already know. We are sometimes told by Catholic apologists that the Reformation in this country was the work of an adulterous king, and the nation forsooth submitted to his will, and the ancient faith was swept out of the land simply because the monarch spoke and said, "Thus and so shall you believe and live." On the other hand, extreme Protestant apologists will tell you that the Reformation sprang from the revolt of men's intellects and consciences against

the doctrines of the Church of Rome, which had ruled for a millennium, and could be borne with no longer. True historians know better. Both are wrong. Great events never proceed from petty causes. It was no fiat of Henry VIII. that made the Reformation in this land after a thousand years of unquestioned rule on the part of the Church of Rome. Neither was it an intellectual revolt against doctrine. No, not one twentieth of the people of this country wanted a change of doctrine. When Queen Elizabeth of famous memory came to the throne her subjects were by no means Protestant, and it may be questioned whether she was. What was it, then? It was the uprising of moral passion against an unworthy clergy, it was the corruptions of the church, the evil lives of those who should have been the shepherds of the people, that destroyed the dominion of the Pope in this land. So it had been long prepared for, but the priestly hierarchy never put forth greater pretensions than on the eve of the Reformation. There came a day when they could not abide the coming of the Lord. Suddenly did He come in His temple, and in one terrible blast, as it seemed, of the sweeping winds of the Most High, the iniquities and absurdities of Rome were swept out of the land. It was a moral revolt. Behind the protest of conscience is omnipotence in any and every age.

The French Revolution was prepared for in like manner, and men did not know it. Never did the French monarchy seem to stand stronger than under Louis XIV. Not even Napoleon at the height of his power ever gave law to Europe as did Louis le Grand. And yet within a few short years of the death of this monarch the cry of a people that had long been oppressed by cruelty and tyranny broke out, and the streets of Paris ran with blood. France passed through the fire. Who shall say that God was a mere looker-on? Do you think God never interferes in history? He interfered in our immediate yesterday and is watching in our to-day. The tares are being burned with unquenchable fire, unquenchable because God lights it, and the judgment from which there is no appeal is ever proceeding.

The gossips are busy to-day with the confessions of Oscar Wilde in "De Profundis," as they were busy yesterday, as it seems, with the tragical death of Whitaker Wright. I never care to employ such life histories in this pulpit as illustrations, if they are only introduced to be reprobated. There is something despicable in the public disposition to trample on a fallen man. Men who worshipped at the shrine of Whitaker Wright when he was in the heyday of his prosperity, and bowed the knee and submitted judgment to Oscar Wilde when he was on the pinnacle of his fame, cursed them both

when fate hurled them from their eminence into Tophet. And yet, brethren, they are types and examples of what Jesus teaches in this thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew, and as it is true of them it is true of all mankind. God has time to watch and rule in the life of a man as he has in the life of a nation or a church. Oscar Wilde confessed that his life was one long quest for pleasure. He had reduced self-indulgence to a science. The end was ignominy, shame, and a living death. Oh the pity, when the tares were burned away and there were left but the embers of a wasted life! Whitaker Wright lived for gain, but in the end, when the wood and the hay and the stubble that he had built upon the foundation God gave were burned away, in one tragic moment, what was left? Only a life that courted death.

It is possible that I address men who are carrying about with them guilty secrets, black and hideous as those of Oscar Wilde or Whitaker Wright, only the world does not know, and men flatter you as they flattered them, and they wait upon you and toady for the little advantage you can confer as these kings of society once were in a position to do. I do not say that exposure waits for you. There are some things worse. You may die what you are now. No tongue will reveal your inmost soul. What of that? God is waiting and makes no blunders. "The fire shall try every man's work

of what sort it is." What are you building? What are you sowing?

There are some, again, who are beginning to find out that the fire is burning, but still the world does not know it. Take that lonely man who has been living a self-centred life, in which he was a deceiver not only of the world without but of the nearest and dearest, and his own soul itself. The hypocrisy which is hypocrite to itself is the worst of all. The tares look like the wheat to the man who prefers to live to the tares. Sir, what has come to you? You are beginning to be found out, not by the world, but by your children maybe, and your own heart is misgiving you that the course you have taken and the life you have lived are a blunder after all. By the time the children begin to find out, not what the father has done, but what he is, and full affection and loyalty and faith are withheld, do you tell me that the fire is not burning? God has made His world so that the guilty who suffer in their guilt would change places a thousand times with the men who suffer for righteousness. You never need to exercise your compassion upon the man whom the fire has tried and found his building good. He is one whose gold comes pure out of the refiner's fire. The rest—the wood, the hay, the stubble—have gone.

“Sowing the seed by the dawnlight fair,
Sowing the seed in the noonday glare,
Sowing the seed in the fading light,
Sowing the seed in the solemn night,
What shall the harvest be?”

God's lightning, His flame of fire!

“Sowing the seed of a lingering pain,
Sowing the seed of a maddened brain,
Sowing the seed of a tarnished name,
Sowing the seed of eternal shame,
What shall the harvest be?”

“He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh
reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit
shall of the Spirit reap eternal life.”

THE DEATH OF THE SOUL.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."—*Ezekiel xviii. 4.*

VI.

THE DEATH OF THE SOUL.

THIS sentence is really the climax of an argument. It is the conclusion, for the sake of which this chapter was written. It occurs more than once in the course of the chapter. The prophet's aim is to emphasize individual in the stead of collective responsibility for sin. That is, the stress should be placed upon the pronoun. "The soul that sinneth, *it* shall die." It will not be the nation, it must not be some other soul or souls, for "every man must bear his own burden." "The soul that sinneth, *that* shall die."

Yet this sentence can easily be misunderstood, and, in fact, often has been misunderstood. Some have a wholly erroneous idea as to what it means. The best way to understand any scripture phrase, or any saying, scriptural or otherwise, is to seek to apprehend or to get into the mental atmosphere of the man who first wrote it. When you have done that, you may find that the saying means much more than he himself saw. But you are on

the right line to discover the larger meaning of the words when you have placed yourself *en rapport*, as it were, with the sentence as it was first spoken. For example, there are few clergymen in the Church of England to-day who could or would subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles precisely in the same sense as the Elizabethan theologians who drew them up, and, no doubt, it would greatly surprise some of those who had the making of them if they could come to life again and hear the interpretation that is put upon them now. One man affirms that they mean such-and-such, and another declares that they mean almost the direct opposite. Now, the proper way to focus a controversy concerning the true meaning of the Articles would be for those who use and cite them to get as nearly as they possibly can into the mental and spiritual atmosphere of the time that gave them birth. They would then probably find that the truths which the Elizabethan divines were struggling to express, and which were greater far than their modes of expression, are still precious, are still living, and, therefore, it would be perfectly legitimate for those who subscribe to the Articles to-day to interpret them in a larger, but not a wholly new, sense than that intended by those who first enunciated them.

Again, it is possible that some who hear me speak from this pulpit from time to time may

take more out of some special sermon than I ever put into it. That is true, I think, of all real preaching. Every man brings his experience to the prophet's utterance, and I am sure that you will pardon me for reminding you that what God gives me to teach from this desk is, in so far as I am faithful, prophetic utterance, differing only in degree, not in kind, from the prophetic utterance that we have read in each other's hearing to-night. But you might take a particular sentence, some one of you, and go home turning it over and over in the light of the experience of the past week or the past year or the past decade, and say to yourself: "I wonder if the preacher really knew himself how much there was in that sentence?" And you would be right in believing that he did not know. All truth is eternal, and the full orb of it no man living in time has ever yet been permitted to see. Your experience will shed new light upon an old saying, a saying too great probably for the experience of the man who utters it. But your reading of it, and your reviewing of it, must not falsify his who is the author of it. So it is with all Old Testament or New Testament Scripture. So it is with the text. I have heard questions asked about this text, and they have been put to me and to other ministers in the following form. This text has been a pivot of controversy. Some one will say: "Does the prophet mean"—or,

rather, they do not usually say, "Does the prophet"—"Does the *Bible* mean that 'to die' in this sentence is to perish utterly and for ever, or does it mean that the sinner must be punished for his sin and suffer for ever?" Put it again—"Does 'to die' mean to perish utterly and for ever, or does it mean suffering for sin that shall endure for ever?" Now we will ask Ezekiel. That is the way to do it. We will take the man who first wrote this sentence; and remember, too, in all probability, before it was written at all, it came white hot from his lips. Suppose we had this old Israelitish prophet with us to-day, and that we interrogated him concerning the meaning of his own words. I can assure you that he would be most astonished to hear the questions which I have just repeated. He would say: "I was not speaking of mortality or immortality, I was speaking of the quality of life, and I was thinking for the moment of the immediate future of my beloved Israel." Let us follow him through the experiences that made him say this, and you will see very soon what he means. This prophet is a prisoner. He is in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. He is one of the Israelitish remnant that have been torn from their home and by whom the plaintive song is sung, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, we wept when we remembered

Zion.” But these captives were not all that there was of Israel. There was still an Israel at home, and a very bad Israel it was. And this Ezekiel, who was a contemporary of the Jeremiah who wrote the Lamentations over that wicked Israel, was looking from his land of captivity far away to the Jerusalem from which he had been torn, and was speaking to his fellow captives thus:—

“Beloved fellow prisoners, our day of deliverance is coming, but it can only come after yonder evil Jerusalem is razed to the ground. Ours it shall be to rebuild the temple, ours it shall be to worship God in a purified sanctuary in the homeland once more. Yonder Israel is preparing her own destruction. As a nation she must perish for her sins.” “But,” he would continue, “some of you, though you have known the hardships of captivity, the humiliation, the degradation that were inflicted upon you by the foe, have not been living worthily of the high destiny of restoring a nobler Israel. Beware what you do. God will not blot out the nation again, but He will blot out the individual who mars His purpose. Beware, you selfish, unpatriotic, slave-hearted men, who are living contentedly in the abominations of the Babylonians. We shall go to the homeland, but the soul that sinneth here, unworthy of the high calling, shall die to Israel, shall be outside the covenant. It will not be the nation that shall

perish; it will be the sinful soul." By soul he simply meant man. By die he meant remain a slave, or bear the penalty of exclusion from the glorious return.

Since Ezekiel wrote we have learned a good deal more as to what is meant by the word "soul." But, as I said at the beginning of the sermon, we have learned nothing that contradicts what Ezekiel saw and declared. The principle upon which he laid emphasis here is this, that the man who is doing wrong to his God does wrong to himself. He is not worthy to rebuild the Temple. He is not worthy to return to the Holy Land. And no nation will suffer for him. God's purposes cannot be foiled. The soul that sinneth, and that alone, must perish—do not be too literal—be shut out from the great destiny of the chosen nation, whatever it may be, here and now. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Now what are we to say "the soul" means? Bear with me while I trace in a few words the history of the term. In the earlier portions of this marvellous Book of Books the word "soul" means little more than the animating principle of all organisms. "The soul" means the breath of the life that distinguishes the things which are organic from the things which are not. Trees and flowers in that sense have and are souls. "Let everything that hath

breath—let everything that hath soul—praise the Lord.” Then it came to mean, as we see, by a narrowing but by an intensification of its meaning, the animating principle of human consciousness. And so the word, delimited, gradually expanded its meaning at the same time that it narrowed it, until in the New Testament and in the later prophecies of the Old Testament, the word soul simply means the man. But in the New Testament again we read, “Body, soul, and spirit.” If the Bible were treated as if every term meant exactly the same thing everywhere, like a mathematical formula, we should be landed in extreme perplexities, for the truth is that sometimes the word soul means spirit, sometimes spirit is no more than a synonym for soul. But when in Pauline language we speak of body, soul, and spirit, we are speaking of three different ideas. The body is the vehicle and instrument of the soul, the soul is the sheath of the spirit, the spirit is the deathless divine, the spark of God’s fire that is in every man, that essence of His own Being without which none of us could exist, and which none of us can destroy. The soul is man’s consciousness of himself, as apart from all the rest of the world, and even from God. The body might be here in all its parts, and yet we should say of some one who has left us that he is gone. What we mean is that that which distinguishes

him from all other humanity, and even from God, his consciousness of himself, our consciousness of him, has departed. That is what we mean by the soul. The soul is in a sense the use that a man makes of his own divinity, the soul is the moral and spiritual consciousness of a man. The spirit is something you can neither make nor mar; the soul is what you make it.

What are we to do with it, this soul of ours, this that marks me as me apart from all mankind? Why, to fill it with God. "This is life eternal, that they may know Thee, the only true God." Death is the absence of that fellowship with God. It is to vitiate that for the sake of which you were given into your own custody, it is the outer darkness, and remember the outer darkness may be here, and we may be living in it now.

Now we begin to understand what Christ meant—that it were possible for a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul. In other words, he is destroying the God-like within himself, he is failing in that for which he was created. He is perishing even where he seems to succeed. What shall it profit a man if he gain all upon which he has set his heart and forfeit his own soul? This, again, is what Paul means when he says he dies to himself that he may live to God. "Ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Death to self, life to God, for to live to one's self is to die to God. Nor is this false to what the prophet we are speaking of here says, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." The question of questions for any of us is this, "What kind of soul are we building? Is our attitude lifeward or deathward? Are we destroying that beautiful thing that God has given into our keeping? Are we marring the divine image within our hearts? Or do we live that life eternal which is life indeed, and which is to know God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent?"

I am afraid lest, in speaking in these terms, I may seem to be using language that is too abstract and doctrinal. If so, I cease to use it from this point. We will now speak about the same truth in relation to ordinary, average human experience or acquaintance with life. Do any of you know what it is to have a childhood's companion or a youth's friend of whom much was expected, but the promise has never been fulfilled? Do you remember that lad who sat beside you in the day-school years ago of whom the masters and proud parents said that one day the world would ring with his name? The boy was endowed with almost every gift that could be thought of for making his way in life. Well,

what has come to him? We have lost sight of him for a few years, maybe, and yesterday we met him. What was it that gave us a shock and a thrill, a sudden sinking of the heart, as we looked into his countenance? Why, this—something was missing that ought to have been there, and something was there we never thought to see. The thing that was missing was life, and the thing that was present was death. That man has lived to the flesh, and of the flesh has reaped corruption. In doing it he has limited, imprisoned, destroyed his own better nature, until now, all involuntarily as it were, as you look on the beast that gazes out of his eyes, you shudderingly say: "He is utterly without soul." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Have you ever had to do as I have, with seeking to comfort a brave man because of a wrecked home? Have you ever listened to a testimony like this: Speaking of a drunken wife, one would say: "Ah, you see her now, but you did not see her as she was. I can remember the day when I took this woman to my fireside, fair as an angel of God, pure and good as she was beautiful. But now you cannot see the angel I saw then. Now she is shift, untruthful, insincere, impure, degraded in thought and mind; giving way to one vice, she has opened the door to a thousand others." But what is wrong? There is some-

thing missing that should be there, and once was, but she has killed it. It is Soul. Poor creature, she has been committing moral suicide. No hand but her own has struck the blow. Verily "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." It is soul that is missing; that beautiful soul that was taken home to the husband's heart years ago has become materialised and bestial now. "The wages of sin is death."

Once more: Perhaps some of you young fellows are in the grip of a man, in business, and under whom you get your living. He is not worthy of your respect. You know well that you are of no value to him. High-mindedness is a disadvantage as far as your service of that man is concerned. He is hard, unscrupulous, a schemer, a man who would cut your throat to make a sovereign. And these things content him, and that is his life. You may meet such men with seared consciences and blunted spiritual susceptibilities every day in your City life. Would you believe it, my lad, that man was once a boy, innocent, childlike, and pure of heart as you were? It may be that as a youth he, too, had his nobler ambitions as you have them now, and if those who knew him better than you and I know him could tell us his life's story they could trace step by step and point by point how that man strangled the life out of the true manhood that was in him. Now he does not

feel and he does not care as you feel and care for him. He has destroyed something that was once there. It is soul that is missing, and he is the murderer. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

To show you that I am honest in applying spiritual truth to ordinary every-day life and thought—doctrine has but a subordinate part to play in it—let me show you a different picture. Amongst my circle of friends there is one whose name you may probably have heard, a man well advanced in years, and better known to an earlier generation than to yours and mine, I mean George Jacob Holyoake. This man is not a Christian, but those who have any acquaintance with his record know that he has done a good many Christian things. I have been reading lately a book in which he has put some recollections of his past. He calls it "Bygones Worth Remembering," and in it he tells the story of some of his moral activities and of the men with whom he shared enthusiasms in earlier days. Amongst those who called him friend were General Garibaldi and the patriot Mazzini. In this book he tells of an occasion on which Mazzini, who was a God-intoxicated man, and whose motto was "God and the People," reasoned with him and with Garibaldi on their materialism, and gave utterance to a sentence of this kind: "No man without a sense of God can possess a sense of duty."

Garibaldi instantly retorted impetuously: "But I am not a believer in God. Have I no sense of duty?" "Ah!" said Mazzini, with a smile, "You drew in your sense of duty with your mother's milk." I could not read an incident like that without a feeling akin to reverence for these great souls with a great ideal. Holyoake served his generation well, so did Garibaldi, so did Mazzini. They were men of soul. Would you deny that they possessed moral and spiritual life? These men were all alive. Mazzini's theology gave way in the presence of the splendid fact. It is the quality of the life into which we have to examine. There is no question but the life was there. In contradistinction to the *roué* I have described, and the hard materialistic man of business I have described, and the poor drunken harlot I have described, think of a Holyoake, a Garibaldi, a Mazzini. In a world where there is not too much moral earnestness, where men care far too little about interests higher and grander than their own, well is it that God has filled some men with such moral courage and high enthusiasms. If Garibaldi had seen and Holyoake had seen what I am going to cite to you now, that soul-life of theirs would have been a still richer, grander thing. Will you let me read to you from the story of the life of John G. Paton, the veteran missionary, as told by himself, an account of the daily

habits of his father and the influence it had on his life? That father was a stocking weaver, a poor man in one of the poor districts of Scotland. "But," says J. G. Paton, "he was a man of prayer." There was one little room in between the "but" and the "ben" of that house, as the Scots call it, into which he retired daily, and often many times a day, "and," says the son, "we children got to understand by a sort of spiritual instinct, for the thing was too sacred to be talked about, that prayers were being poured out there for us as though by the high priest within the veil of the Holy of Holies. We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of the trembling voice pleading as if for life, and we children learned to slip out and in, past that door on tip-toe, and not to disturb the holy converse. The outside world might not know, but we knew whence came that happy life, that new-born smile that was always dawning in my father's face. It was a reflection from the divine presence in the consciousness of which he lived. Never in temple or cathedral or mountain or glen can I hope to feel that the Lord God is more near, more visibly walking and talking with men than under that humble cottage roof of thatch and open work. Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of my memory or blotted from my understanding, my

soul would wander back to those early scenes and shut itself up again in that sanctuary, hearing still the echo of those cries to God, would hurl back at doubt with the victorious appeal, 'he walked with God; why may not I?'

Now I want you, young and old, who could not have written that passage, to weigh well this fact, that the experience of this old Scottish weaver, which cast such a spell on the life of his son, is as much a fact of the universe as the rain that is falling outside, and it needs to be accounted for and given its due place. It is the most precious thing in the whole range of possible human experience that a man might walk with God, that the light eternal might shine in his heart, that the soul might live. Truly this is life, to know God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. There is no other life that is life indeed. "He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death."

Contrast again in your mind for a moment this experience with that of the man you will meet to-morrow, of whom you will say, such an one is dead to right feeling, such another is dead to truth and honour, and, saddest of all, perhaps, you may say of some cynical, selfish being, he is dead to love.

But what are *you* doing? You are either marching towards the ideal of Paton's father or

you are marching away from it. To be as full of moral passion as a Holyoake or a Garibaldi is better than to live for self or the world alone. But how few there are who know what true life is. This humble Scottish peasant who walked with God knew where it was to be found. Do you? In my greenhouse sometimes I see a plant, from which I expected something, marring its promise. One tiny speck of rust on a white petal, and I know my plant is doomed. That speck is death; there will be another to-morrow, and yet another to follow. Presently the soul, so to speak, of my little plant will be destroyed. Every time you commit a sinful act you destroy something beautiful which God made to bloom within your nature, you have a speck of death upon your soul. And every time you lift heart and mind and will heavenward, and every time your being aspires to God and truth, and every time the noble and the heroic and the beautiful have dominion over you (for these are God) then you are entering into life. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "But if by the Spirit a man do mortify the deeds of the body, he shall live." "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

WASTED SACRIFICE.

"To what purpose is this waste?"—*Matthew xxv: 3.*

VII.

WASTED SACRIFICE.

SOMEWHAT of mystery surrounds the story of the anointing of our Lord in Simon's house. Most modern commentators think there were two anointings, both taking place in the house of a man named Simon, but in the one case Simon the Pharisee, and in the other Simon the leper. An old Roman Catholic tradition insists that there was but one anointing, Simon the Pharisee and Simon the leper being one and the same; and, more startling still, and to some minds repellent, Mary of Bethany and the woman who was a sinner the same. From Matthew xxvi. it is clear that the anointing and the betrayal of our Lord were very near together; John xii. shows that the person who anointed Jesus after the death of Lazarus and immediately before the betrayal was Mary of Bethany, and we have our Lord's word for it that this anointing was done with a view to His burial. With a view to His burial? Surely it was an act of grateful homage, because He had just brought

her brother back from the dead, and the ointment which was intended for the body of Lazarus she now offered for the burial of his Master. Whatever the motive may have been, this was a loving service rendered in anticipation of a coming tragedy. Jesus had just announced to His disciples the crucifixion in plain terms, but they—dull-witted, ambitious, slow to understand—passed the remark by unheeded. Not so Mary. With a woman's swift insight she detected the presence of death in this guest-chamber, she saw it on the lowering brow and the cruel faces of the Pharisees, she heard it in their whispered plottings, she discerned it in the covetous countenance of Judas. So it may have been that the alabaster box was produced and the tears were shed because she saw that her Master was doomed to death.

Observe what follows. Judas speaks first:—"To what purpose is this waste? This ointment might have been sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor." John's caustic comment is, "This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." The chagrin which he must have felt at the rebuke of the Master had something to do with the promptitude of the betrayal, which is told in the succeeding few verses. It is remarkable, too, that the word "waste" is used again, very close to this scene, but this time by our Lord. In

His last prayer, while the feet of the betrayer are on their way to the place where He is, He says: "None of them is lost but the son of perdition"—i.e., the wasted one. It is the same word in both sentences. We know what was the motive of Judas, but the evangelist says also that the disciples "had indignation"—literally, the disciples "angrily protested"—saying, "To what purpose is this waste?" Then Jesus flings His protection over the woman with the sad comment, "Why trouble ye the woman, for she hath wrought a good work upon Me? For ye have the poor always with you," though you are not always thinking about them; "but Me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial." It is not all waste: "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." There was a partial answer to the question, "To what purpose is this waste?" The act of mournful homage performed by Mary at Bethany before the betrayal was not waste at all. To-day we recognise the spirit that prompted the deed, and in so far as we have learned to love and follow Christ we are willing in the same spirit to offer to Him what we have.

The question in its essence is asked to-day in the course of every seemingly fruitless sacrifice. We

are all familiar with the phrase, the waste of Nature—

“Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shrieks against our creed,
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life.”

“So careful of the type?” It takes her æons to produce a type that she will destroy in an hour. Nature is prodigal of her physical experiments, and she recks not of the pain that she causes. But to what purpose? many are asking to-day. To what purpose is the waste of sentient life upon this planet? Mr. H. G. Wells has issued a book whose theme is a phenomenon produced by the discovery on the part of some scientist of what he calls “The Food of the Gods.” Its effect is to make men grow forty feet high, and stronger and perhaps wiser than they were before. He makes one of his giants, just waking into mental adolescence, ask over and over again, “What is it all for?” The “little people,” the rest of mankind, shut the giant up in a chalk pit, and make him work for their benefit. He questions with himself, “What is it all for? What does it mean? What do the little people mean? What does anybody mean? What do I mean? What is it all for? To what purpose?” The novelist thus answers the question through the mouth of another of his giants:—

“It is not that we would oust the little people

from the world, in order that we, who are no more than one step upwards from their littleness, may hold their world for ever. It is the step we fight for, and not ourselves . . . to serve the spirit and the purpose that has been breathed into our lives. We fight not for ourselves, for we are but the momentary hands and eyes of the Life of the World. . . . Through us and through the little folk the Spirit looks and learns. From us, by word and birth and act, it must pass—to still greater lives. This earth is no resting place; this earth is no playing place . . . we fight not for ourselves, but for growth—growth that goes on for ever. To-morrow, whether we live or die, growth will conquer through us. That is the law of the Spirit for evermore.”

I feel a serious purpose underlying Mr. Wells's words and what seems the extravagance of his conception. He is urging that there may be a serious purpose at the back of the universe, making itself dynamically felt in the experience of humankind and of all beneath humankind. But we are only instruments, not ends; we are but here to-day to serve to-morrow, a to-morrow in which we have no share: all our joys and all our sorrows count as nothing in the vast, inexorable, mighty process. “To what purpose is this waste?” Mr. Wells would say that it is for a larger to-morrow. Well, but to what purpose is the waste of that which is

making the to-morrow and is in our midst and manifested through our lives to-day? Most people will feel that this theory is all very well for the vast, vague, undreamed-of future, but it is poor comfort for the present. Yet you read this very lesson all through human history. Men serve a greater than they know: —

“The best men doing their best
Know peradventure least of what they do :
The nail that holds the wood must pierce it first,
And He alone who wields the hammer sees
The work advanced by the earnest blow.”

Yet to what purpose is the waste of any noble life in the service of an invisible to-morrow? Dr. Parker in some of his moods used to speak as though the only immortality he desired was to live on in the work and in the record of the City Temple. Some of you feel he was worth a larger immortality than that. But I will go back beyond Dr. Parker, to the minister whose very name is unknown to some who worship here. The founder and the first minister of the church which to-day worships in the City Temple, Thomas Goodwin, in 1640, looking forward upon the history of his beloved country, did not dream of this audience, and did not see his present successor. Thomas Goodwin, chaplain to Cromwell—grim, serious, high-minded, Puritan divine—could not foresee the England of to-day when he took his stand for ecclesiastical liberty in a contest that for the

moment failed, but in the long years won. Goodwin's immortality is proclaimed in what we are and in what we enjoy. Is it enough? Not a man among you would think it is. If that be all, great as the price is, and willing as he might be to pay it, we should say the man who could pay the price was worthy of a larger immortality still. "To what purpose is this waste?" Richard Baxter might have been Archbishop of Canterbury, but he lived and died a dissenting minister in a Midland town. To what purpose, said his contemporaries, is this waste? If Baxter were here he could tell you by what England is to-day. Baxter's championship of the rights of conscience did not seem to bring any very clear and magnificent results, and even if it had we should feel that the life of Baxter was entitled to something more than England has even yet garnered. A Chillingworth, resisting on the one side the superficial, heady, evil-living cavalier, and on the other the grim intolerant Puritan, himself stood for toleration. They persecuted him, even to his death-bed, and the last request he made was only for liberty to die in peace. If I could summon Chillingworth from his grave to-day, his verdict upon the result of his brave witness, so apparently unavailing, would, I think, be an optimistic one. Yet men who loved him then were entitled to ask, and probably did ask, as he died, an unavailing witness

for a distant ideal, "To what purpose is this waste?" My point is that it is not sufficient to say that Chillingworth did the work without knowing all that he did, and gained the victory without being aware that there was an inevitable victory to be gained: we feel that Chillingworth himself was entitled to live to see it in time or in eternity; if not, the victory has something sinister in it after all. "To what purpose is this waste?"

To bring home the question to your minds, have you ever considered that you have entered into this great succession yourselves, and that your law and your testimony are no more hopelessly obscure than that of these great ones who have passed, as some would tell us, into dust—the eyes and the hands of the powers of the universe for a moment, nothing more? Are you yourselves content to be paving stones upon a road that is being made broader and stronger for after-ages to walk upon? Oh, I am glad if you are willing to be, but in the name of eternal right I would claim for you a larger destiny, otherwise to what purpose your anguish and your toil?

"We are builders of that city,
All our joys and all our groans
Help to rear its shining ramparts,
All our lives are building-stones;
But the work that we have builded,
Oft with bleeding hands and tears,
And in error and in anguish,
Will not perish with our years.

“It will last and shine transfigured
In the universal plan ;
It will help to crown the labours
Of the toiling hosts of man.
It will last and shine transfigured
In the final reign of right,
It will merge into the splendours
Of the city of the light.”

“To what purpose is this waste?” “To build the city of God.” But most of us who try to live for an ideal not only want to serve it: we want to see it realised, else we shall be asking, “To what purpose is this waste?” What about the wasted love and pain of all the centuries—the love and pain that have failed? Richard Baxter can look down to-day with larger other eyes, if so be that God has permitted him vision, and he can see the triumph of the rights of conscience. A Chillingworth can look upon a toleration approximately perfect; here we worship under our own vine and fig tree, none daring to make us afraid. A Thomas Goodwin can see the cause that went down in blood raised again in triumph; England is doing honour to the sons who served her in ages past. Even a Joseph Parker, only of yesterday, can look upon to-day with a feeling of thankfulness, and say, “I have laboured; others have entered into the labour; the work endures; God has the glory.”

But what about those, the great nameless host, who cannot say this—the people whose tears have

fallen into the ground and perished in nothingness and been forgotten—the people whose anguish was as a cry that went up to a black heaven and a deaf God, the people whose broken hearts have no remedy in this world and no token and no witness for the next, that the purpose for which they sighed, for the sake of which they suffered, the rights that they lived to serve, have been God secured, or that there is aught divine to hear and heed? What about the anguish that has failed? I am now thinking about an old woman whom I knew years ago, and who may be alive yet, into whose experience there came somewhat such as I have described, and, most cruelly, toward the end of life. She and her husband took somebody else's child to their hearts, having no child of their own. Everything that love could do for that little one was done for her. There was no lack either of money or of tenderness, and the high character of this foster father and mother should have been enough, one might think, to secure the girl's future. What became of her? Happily, that true father went home before the trouble came; the poor mother did not. That girl brought shame on a grand old name; she wrecked the home, broke that mother-heart, and, what is more, she gloried and persisted in her shame. Her whole nature seemed to change and harden; when last I heard of her she was as bitter and brazen as she had ever

been, wallowing in her sin. When we think of what went before, of the anguish endured by that simple-hearted, godly woman who brought up the girl, I feel something of the indignation of the disciples who witnessed the squandering of the precious ointment, "To what purpose is this waste?" I do not even ask the obvious question why, in the later days of her life, was this poor woman permitted so to suffer; we will go beyond that question: to what purpose was the waste of holy ointment, of unselfish service? I will try to find the answer presently; if there is one, we will seek to discover it. Let me give you another instance. One Sunday morning, after service, I was accosted by a gentleman, a man of education and position, who looked what he was, a man who could front the whole world. He had lived a Christian life, and when I use that word I would withdraw from it every suggestion of cant; I mean that he was a Christ-like man, and, as often happens, he had a skeleton in the cupboard; he had the torturing problem of another's evil life to mar the peace of his own. He said to me shyly, and with an apology for troubling, "You have so much to do with young men, and from your pulpit you speak to so many, that some day you may happen to find my lad. If you do, I hope you will tell him that I do not feel hard towards him; we are heart-broken at home—I do not mind saying so." Then, as he

turned to leave the vestry, he added, "He was the child of many prayers." I have never found his lad, I do not know whether he went home, I could not tell you who the father is; but this is the question which is in my heart, and I doubt not in yours: "The child of many prayers. To what purpose was it so?" Imagine what it all means. The father and mother kneeling in the vacant chamber praying for the child that was once a baby nursed by both, loved by both, exulted over with the love of a God-like fatherhood and motherhood. They prayed for him—oh, you may be sure if he is not home they are praying for him to-day. What a prayer! There is heart's blood in it. "To what purpose is this waste?" Before I pass on, let me speak directly to you face to face and heart to heart about your own problem. Here is one, it may be, to whom God gave a great capacity for love; it was crucified. Your life has been spoilt for you; man or woman, you gave your best. Cruel, chaotic world! It was taken from you, and nothing has come in its place. What is the song you are singing?

"I have a room whereinto no one enters,
Save I myself alone;
There sits a blessed memory on a throne.
There my life centres.

If any should force entrance he might see there
One buried, yet not dead,
Before whose face I no more bow my head,
Or bend my knee there."

To what purpose was the waste? Husband or wife, father, mother, child, who knows the problem of standing between another's sin and the reproach of mankind, I am going to speak to you. What a tragedy is his who tries to shield a guilty secret not his own from the cruel cognisance of the world! Someone you dearly love, and for whom you would die a thousand deaths, has a vice which means ruin. You have been trying, trying all you know, and all your soul will allow you to do; you have laid yourself upon the altar of God's service, and are seeking to purge out that vice, and to save that loved one, and that the world should not know. But the truth is coming out; utterly useless is your consecration and your unselfish vicarious sacrifice; the world is whispering, and to-morrow you will feel as though every bird that flies in heaven is telling the story of the sadness of your home. To what purpose your wasted energy, unselfish prayer, and noble sacrifice? God only knows. The meaning is to be sought in this: our solidarity with Christ the Crucified. That does not simply mean resignation to a Calvary and a silent tomb; no, that is not all. All holy solicitude is a divine touch; you are but God's finger—His is the heart behind the hand. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." "My word shall not return unto Me void, but shall accomplish that whereunto I sent it." Dwell on those words. "My

Father worked hitherto, and I work." How long, Lord Jesus? "Until the day break and the shadows flee away." "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." The universe is all of a piece; we do not commonly allow God a big enough arena in which to work His mighty work, nor is Mr. Wells's giant-world as big as the real world in which God reigns. The further world and the hither world are locked together. God knows thy sighs and counts thy tears; God shall lift up thy head. Nothing that is of God can perish. This life you live is His, not yours; these prayers you utter were His before they became yours. In time or in eternity God's word of truth prevails.

"Be sure that God ne'er dooms to waste,
The strength He deigns impart."

A last thought I would leave with you—to me the most precious of all. We speak much about judgment—judgment upon evil-doing. Have you ever thought about the judgment upon righteousness? These two are one. The judgment upon evil-doing is paralleled by the judgment upon well-doing. We say of this man, who is sowing to his flesh and of the flesh reaping corruption: Exactly what he sows he shall reap; he is putting out his life at usury, and he will pay the last farthing. We say that, and most of us believe it in our best moments—

“Sowing the seed of a lingering pain,
Sowing the seed of a maddened brain,
Gathered in time or eternity,
Sure, ah ! sure, will the harvest be.”

“Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.” Now turn the obverse of the coin. We believe that the weeds come up: are we to believe that the good seed dies? We believe a tree of self-indulgence bears an evil fruit, a harvest of agony: does the agony endured beforehand bear no fruit? No, the one judgment involves the other, and completes it. It is just because there is a judgment that vindicates love that there is a judgment upon sin. I would speak to a young man whose conduct illustrates this principle. You have been doing your best to ruin your life, and with it the peace of a nobler than yours; you have been breaking your mother's heart, dishonouring your father's name. You know what a long life-ache you have given them: what is the end of it? You say, in desperation, “I know the end, do not tell me it is coming: already I have the first fruits of that bitter harvest.” Have you? Young man, God is going to hurt you as sure as to-day's sun has risen, He is going to break you because someone is praying for you. Gathered in time or eternity, what will the harvest of anguish be? God will turn the loving prayers of those whom you have treated so badly into flames of fire, and they

will scorch you back into purity, that purity you wickedly flung away. "He maketh His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire." O vicarious sufferers, your prayers are going on, your tears are not forgotten, your nobleness is bearing its usury, and, like the crucifixion of our blessed Lord—like it? included in it—that love of yours is pleading in eternity. Autumn sun, why are you shining? There will be no more harvest this year: the leaves are falling, the flowers are dying, the winter is coming. Autumn sun, why are you shining? Because, while the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest shall not cease. It is for the spring time the autumn sun is shining now. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

HELL'S VISION OF HEAVEN.

"In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom."—*St. Luke xvi. 23.*

VIII.

HELL'S VISION OF HEAVEN.

THE story before us is a good example of our Lord's method of teaching by parable; and it is also characteristic of St. Luke's gospel that it should find record here, and not in the other evangelists. I say it is a good example of our Lord's parabolic teaching, because none of us, I suppose, imagines that Jesus meant us to take the story literally and in all respects just as it stands. Neither did His hearers imagine that He was giving here the sum and substance of a veritable conversation between their ancestor Abraham and one of their own day who had passed into the unseen. No, this is a parable, and, being a parable, we must look for its spiritual lesson, and it should not be difficult to come upon the meaning our Lord sought to convey.

Again, as I have said, it is characteristic of St. Luke that this narrative is to be found in his gospel alone. The authorship gives us some clue to the meaning of Jesus when He told it. For

Luke invariably shows pity and tenderness for the lot of the poor and the heavy laden. More conspicuously than Matthew, Mark and John, is this the case with what he records of our Lord's words and his own setting of them. Why is it so? Well, in all probability because Luke had been in danger of being a type of the rich man here described. Luke, the beloved physician, like St. Paul, was educated as a Pharisee. His early days were passed among the cultured and the wealthy. Like the Pharisees, he might have trusted in his own righteousness and despised others, especially the forsaken and the down-trodden. I say he might, but then he met Jesus, and his whole outlook upon life was changed, and far more completely, probably, than even if he had been brought up among the poor. He saw Christ's poor with the eyes of Christ, and learned to sympathise and to help. That aspect of the Gospel he made particularly his own which he expresses in his setting of the Beatitude, "Blessed are ye poor," the equivalent of Matthew's "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus probably used both expressions.

Well, brethren, if this gives us a clue to the narrative, and I think it does, let us examine together its main features before we proceed to attempt to penetrate the lesson it contains.

First, then, we have the figure of the rich man,

who is clothed in purple and fine linen, and fares sumptuously every day. There was no crime in being clothed in purple and fine linen, nor even in faring sumptuously. No specific sin was laid to the charge of the rich man who is introduced into the parable. But, reading between the lines of Luke's sympathy with the poor, and of the force of the Greek phrase, "*even the dogs* licked the sores of Lazarus," we may see that our Lord intended to warn the proud Pharisees who were listening to Him. This man was rich in wealth, in position, in opportunity, but along with these came a temper of mind and a moral attitude which were unlovely. This man had the true Pharisaic spirit, the spirit of those who bound heavy burdens upon men's shoulders, but would not so much as touch them with the tips of their fingers. He had no pity to spare for the beggar at the gate, who sought for the crumbs that fell from his table. It is not **so** much what he did, or what he left undone, **for** which the rich man is to blame; it is for what he was, it is **for** the set of his character, it is for the way his face was turned. Purse-proud, hard, gross, materialistic, content with things as they are, and without a thought for things as they ought to be, such is the character of the rich man as suggested here. Remember that Jesus has the Pharisee in mind, and you have the clue to the kind of rich man He is describing.

Now, as I have just said when I adduced the experience and training of St. Luke, there was nothing blameworthy merely about the fact that he was rich. Jesus consorted with such. If Luke himself was the son of a rich man, and brought up amid refinement, as was probably the case, he was not the only one in the intimate circle of Jesus of whom this could be said. Lazarus of Bethany was most likely a rich man. He was not of the chosen circle of the twelve, but he was of the intimates of the heart of Jesus, yet the son of a Pharisee. It may have been that it was in the Garden of Lazarus that Jesus passed through His lonely vigil and His agony and bloody sweat, before He was betrayed. Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man, and in his tomb was Jesus laid. It was not the fact of riches, but the evil use of them, and the temper they bred against which Jesus spoke. It was not money only, but position, and opportunity for joy-making, which Jesus thought about, and for neglect or misuse of which He reprobated him who cared for himself alone and had no pity to spare for those less fortunately circumstanced. He who despised Lazarus as a beggar man was one to whom God had given opportunities for making the world nobler and gladder, and he misused them. His warnings are solemn indeed. "Woe unto you, rich men, for ye have received your consolation." "How hardly

shall they that trust in riches enter into the Kingdom of God." "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Whatever was meant by these hyperbolic statements, you and I know quite well how true Jesus was to human nature when He told us it was difficult, nay, almost impossible, for a man of wealth and fame and power to retain with these things the heart of a little child.

What of the figure of Lazarus? The beggar man we are told little about beyond this, that he was poor with an abject poverty, that he was a sufferer, and that the disease from which he suffered was loathsome and repellent in the extreme. Why did Jesus paint such a picture? Was there anything meritorious in poverty? Not at all. There is a possible Pharisee in the cottage as well as in the palace. There is a possible Pharisaism of poverty, the opposite of poverty of spirit, and Jesus did not speak of this. But His purpose explains itself. In Jesus' day and among the Jewish people misfortune was looked upon as a sign of the disfavour of God, and more than once Jesus had to set Himself to correct that erroneous, unspiritual view. "Lord, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither," said the Master, "but that the works of God might be shown forth in him." "Think not that

those upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell were sinners above all Galilæans. I tell you nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." Too prone were the contemporaries of the Master to think of the rich man in his high place, and the Pharisees with their learning, and their influence, and their arrogance, as the favourites of Deity, and the unfortunate ones and the sufferers of the earth as those for whom He has no concern, who perhaps were indeed the objects of His just displeasure. That is why the figure of Lazarus is introduced.

Now take our Lord's account of the respective destinies of these two men. Lazarus dies and is carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The phrase "Abraham's bosom" was a well-known one, current among the people of Judea to express the bliss of the faithful Israelite who had passed to his reward. It is all but a synonym for heaven. When Jesus used the phrase "Abraham's bosom" He meant that in spite of the earthly appearances which would point to the disfavour of God, Lazarus had passed into the bliss of the righteous. "The rich man died and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." The word used for hell in this place is "Hades," the place of departed spirits, the very place where Lazarus was. That is an important point which should not be lost sight of. Between him and

Lazarus there was distance, but it was not so great but that the rich man could call to him he had erstwhile despised, and ask his sympathy and help. And yet he was in hell, in much of the sense in which you and I would use that word. He lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and called to Father Abraham to send him by hand of Lazarus the pity he himself had withholden in life. And Abraham's reply is, "It cannot be." What, no ministry from him whom God has exalted to him whom He has abased? Christ did not say so. But there are some ministries that are impossible. Righteousness may pity and serve unrighteousness, but it cannot identify itself with it. Between the rich man and the erstwhile beggar man was a great gulf fixed, but the gulf consisted not in where they were but in what they were. That is the point of the narrative. Abraham could enter into colloquy with the suffering sinner whom God was punishing, for the distance did not fix the gulf, it was character and experience that fixed it. The rich man and Lazarus were in the same place, but there was a gulf between them which neither could pass over.

This teaches me two lessons which I pass on to you. The first is this: Heaven and hell are states of the soul rather than of the body, whether it be the spiritual or the natural body. These are ex-

periences independent of place and time. As Milton has it :

“The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”

Or, as the Persian poet puts it,

“I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that after-life to spell,
And by-and-bye my Soul return'd to me,
And whispered, ‘I myself am Heaven and Hell ;’

“Heaven but the vision of fulfill'd desire,
And Hell the shadow from a Soul on fire.”

Heaven and hell may dwell in the same home, sit at the same table, sleep in the same bed, but between them is a great gulf fixed. Here, for example, is a home in which one lad goes wrong, bears about with him a guilty secret he may not tell to the rest, and yet he must keep the dreadful company of his guilty self. Every time that lad hears the happy laughter of brothers or sisters the fires of hell are burning in his heart. Every time he receives his father's benediction or listens to his mother speaking of him in the language of maternal pride, he knows that between them and him there is a gulf fixed, and over it neither he nor they can pass. To the sinner abiding in his sin even the language of love is part of the torture of hell.

Here is another home in which an unhappy man

has power to afflict those who are weaker than himself. He has lived for wrong and vicious ideals all his life, and they have grown stronger as he has grown older. He has power to oppress and crush one faithful, noble woman, whose very presence and whose purity of character are a rebuke to him. The more nobly she lives, the better for him she cares, the fiercer seems to burn his anger, because he knows he is not worthy of such devotion. He does not repent, but he suffers remorse, and between the two there is a great gulf fixed. The fires of hell are burning in that man's experience now, for guilt is often made more devilish by the presence of holiness.

And in our acquaintance with life have we never suspected that the fires are burning where the world sees not? There are people facing life to-day with a smile who are not to be counted heroes, merely because behind the smile is pain. Some people can smile, as it were, in the shadow of the cross, and they do well. They are God's great ones. But there are others who wear the smile of dreadful joy, the smile of sin's make-believe. Down beneath are the fires of hell, kindled by the pollution and the corruption and the wickedness on which the soul has fed. We can meet with hell in the palace, in the business house, in the cottage home, and salute it and pass it by, and never know, but hell knows, for it has seen heaven.

Oh, someone will say, wait a little, you have overstated your case. Some of the worst men are the happiest and the most content with life, and the smile of which you speak on the face of a bad man may be absolutely sincere. The beggar-man may lie unheeded at their gate and need, in vain, their sympathy and their helping hand. It is not always money the suppliant wants, he wants *soul*, and it is withheld by the man who might have been what now he never wants to be, a minister to the world's woe. And yet he is glad. What of him? "*And the rich man died, and was buried.*" The hand of death can strip away all delusions, and you and I, old men and young, no matter what our theology may be, or whether we have any at all, have to face the king of terrors some day. Some day our brief earthly life will be over. We shall be in the hands of one who does not let go. What shall we discover then? "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, and then whose shall these things be for which thou hast lived and hast enjoyed alone?" Naked and open are we to Him with Whom we have to do, and, believe me, nothing can avail to save us from what we are in the great day of revelation, whether it come on this side of the grave or on the other, when delusions are gone, and we find ourselves in our heaven or our hell. We may eat, drink, and be merry; we may stifle the move-

ment of the better soul within us, but some day it wakens and will be heard, and the wakening is pain.

This reminds me that we have now arrived at the second lesson of which I spoke a few minutes ago. It is this: Hell is at its fiercest when it sees heaven, and not till then. Follow the rich man's prayer, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus." And it is refused, for there is a sense in which Lazarus can never come, as I have already shown. Love cannot save guilt from the fire itself has kindled, nay, it may increase it. "Then, Father Abraham, send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." There is something here I want you to see. It is that in the rich man—poor sufferer, rich man is the wrong term for him now, when everything in which he trusted has been burned away—in the rich man there is this sign of grace. There is no suggestion of finality here. When he sat, proud and self-sufficient, in his haughtiness within his earthly home, he had no thought to spare for those who were likely to come into such an experience as his. But now he *has*, because he had seen heaven, because he had come face to face with things as they might have been. His hell burned the more fiercely for the vision, but he was nearer God. "If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make

my bed in hell, behold Thou art there.' Sooner or later heaven and hell meet each other, that which might have been in our life, and that which is—it may be on this side of death, it may be on the other, but that great antithesis will come, and we shall be under no delusion when it does come. Our hell will gain in fierceness when we have seen the heaven that ought to be.

One morning I went for a walk in a plot of ground, near to my home, which at this season of the year is rapidly becoming gloriously beautiful. The touch of spring is on it. On my way to it I observed, to my astonishment, great billowy clouds of smoke. I wondered what it was, but I soon discovered the reason. The gardener had been busy. The rubbish and the corruption of the winter had been gathered into one pretty little spot, one secluded corner of the ground in which I was accustomed to walk, and was burning. It was not burning well, so I took a stake from near by, and stirred up the mass, letting in the free, bright air of heaven, and then it burst into radiant flame, and was soon consumed. "Ah," I said to myself, "this heap of corruption in the very midst of sylvan and floral beauty is like hell in heaven. Hell burns the hotter at the touch of heaven."

So it is in every wicked, selfish human life, on this side of the grave or on yonder. A man may not be capable of seeing now what he is, but God

will leave him in no delusion in the great day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and the life becomes its own hell in the midst of the heaven that might have been.

Before I sit down there is one word I should like to add about Abraham's answer to the rich man's prayer. "If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe though one rose from the dead." It has an important bearing on our text. "If they believe not Moses and the prophets." Why should they believe Moses and the prophets? The rich man's chief concern now that his soul was awake was that his brothers might be told how certain it was that there was a heaven to win, a hell to shun. But the reply of Abraham was, "They have Moses and the prophets! If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe though one rose from the dead." Are there some here in the position of the rich man and his brothers? You say to yourself, "If I could only be certain that there was an after life at all, if I could only be sure that the grave did not end everything, I might order my life differently." Would you? That is a poor sort of offering to God, who is righteousness. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." You tell Him that you calculate chances, and that if you could only be sure there is an eternity, that there is a Christ, that there is a judgment upon

sin, that you would make a different thing of your life! O, sir, the very attitude is preparing your hell. All beautiful souls are God's prophets, God's index fingers pointing towards heaven. You have seen enough, and know enough, even without any preacher, for the living of life in purity and righteousness and truth. Why do you not do it? It is not for rewards nor for punishments that righteousness should be lived, but because it is written large within your own heart. If any makes that excuse to himself at this time I would commend to him the words of Mr. Gladstone, written to his own son in the prime of the great statesman's career: "Believe in life as a great and noble calling, not a mean and grovelling thing, to be suffled through as best we may, but an elevated and lofty destiny."

The man who could write that had seen what Jesus taught through the mouth of Abraham in this parable. If they believe not this kind of testimony, the testimony of a Christ-like life lived in obedience to the things that are morally obligatory, rewards and punishments aside, it is beside the mark and futile to call one from the dead. Brethren, as soon as we get into this region, and talk about high and holy living, what can we do without Jesus? All the great and brave spirits of this age or any other age since Jesus was preached for the first time have turned to Him

when they thought of God and truth. They cannot ignore Jesus. "Everyone that hath heard of the Father and hath learned cometh unto Me."

"Alone, O Love ineffable, Thy saving Name is
given,
To turn aside from Thee is Hell, to walk
with Thee is Heaven."

THE NEW BIRTH.

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."—*St. John iii 3.*

IX.

THE NEW BIRTH.

THIS is one of the most familiar texts in the whole range of Scripture, and yet I believe this is the first time I have ever read this chapter, much less spoken from this text, in the City Temple: why, I hardly know; probably chiefly because of the conventional ideas that have clustered about this most beautiful spiritual principle and obscured it. And yet the text is one of such wondrous significance, and is so precious a spiritual experience, that it is impossible altogether to ignore it, whether it is preached from or not. It is presumed in every sermon in which Christ is really exalted, and it is the root principle of all true spiritual life. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Yet it is remarkable that it seems somewhat of an exception in our Lord's teaching. This is the only place in the New Testament where it is referred to in these terms, and it seems as though this was the only occasion on which our Lord ever em-

ployed any such words. Indeed, it has been questioned whether these are His words at all. He speaks them here in private, and to one man only, and if ever they were made public in the form in which they were spoken, it must have been because this man told it.

What could our Lord really have meant? The verse as it stands has become associated with certain religious ideas which are familiar to us all. The text as it came from the lips of the Master has a certain freshness which I will dare to say not any of us has adequately understood. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." More literally, "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And better still, "Except a man be quickened from above he cannot see the kingdom of God." This, I say, is the root principle of all true spiritual experience. Why did not Jesus state it openly? It seems to be here a kind of esoteric teaching. One man, and that not a man of His most familiar circle, heard Him say it, and one gospel, and one gospel only, enshrined it. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have nothing like it.

Wait a moment. Matthew and Mark and Luke affirm it in as plain terms as St. John. And Jesus had this principle upon His lips every time he stood up to speak about the kingdom of God. This was the burden of His teaching, this was the mar-

row of His message; when He stood upon the hillsides of Galilee and addressed the simple folk who heard Him gladly, this principle was what He had to speak about and to declare. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Here is the same principle set forth in these immortal paradoxes which shall live as long as a spiritual man is to be found in the world. Jesus is saying here substantially the same thing as He said to Nicodemus. The poor in spirit, the pure in heart, those who know their needs and are single in their desires, have the kingdom of God, know the love of the Father, have seen, have entered in. They have been born from above, and except a man be quickened so, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And yet this principle has, like all other fructive ideas, been hardened and literalised in the course of its history until sometimes it has been twisted out of all recognition. I was reading but a few days ago a letter addressed by Cardinal Manning to Dr. Pusey, and in the course of it that eminent man makes a remark of this kind. He said, Once a child has been baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, whether by a member of the Roman communion or not, I thank God he is a member of the church of Christ. He has received supernatural grace in the sacra-

ment of baptism, and he is therefore a member of Christ and of His body, the Church. If, he continued, that child commits no mortal sin from childhood to old age, he will assuredly be saved because of this sacramental act, the condition of a spiritual regeneration. Now I have a reverence for the memory of Dr. Manning, but I confess I could not understand, and shall never understand, how a man of the intellectual eminence of the Cardinal could really believe that this is the true explanation of this beautiful principle which our Lord declares in the third of John. It is all true, no doubt, that to bring a child within the sphere of the fold of Christ gives him a great chance of growing up in it, a chance of becoming a member of His body, the Church, and entering into the kingdom of God. I praise God, like Cardinal Manning, for all those who have been brought to God's altar in the arms of loving parents, but to think that any mere external rite can ever bring a man to God or the absence of it keep him away from Him, is to me a most extraordinary supposition, the most astonishing distortion of this text that could have been possible in the history of Christendom.

Oh, brethren, if this had been its meaning, the surprise of Jesus that Nicodemus did not understand would have been altogether unreasonable. Why was it that Nicodemus did not at once under-

stand? Why was it that his eyes were holden that he could not see, his ears were stopped that he could not hear? Not because the principle was new. It was new in its present form, but it had always been true of any man who had turned Godward and forsaken the evil past and received a new breath of the divine Spirit from above, and Nicodemus ought to have known it.

In Christian history even we Evangelicals have limited this wonderful fact. We have associated it with certain forms of decision for Christ. We have supposed we have attained it when we have got somebody to say something about his belief in certain Evangelical facts. We have been prone to associate the principle with the form or forms in which it has been enshrined age after age. Great waves of spiritual power have swept over the church in all the centuries of its existence, and at intervals in its history. A Francis of Assisi gathers three thousand people round him in the plains of Lombardy to listen to his message of the love of God. A John Wesley rouses all England and beyond it, and to-day his followers number thirty millions, who have been drawn by the same gospel and have made the same decision as their master. A D. L. Moody came when England was at a low spiritual ebb indeed, and from shore to shore he aroused this land with the story of the love of God in Jesus Christ. But imagine, if you

could have Francis and Wesley and Moody together, how strange would be their attitude to one another, how completely surprised at the utterance of what they thought non-essential, or even erroneous, in the teaching of the others—a Francis deferential to the Pope, a Moody who would have shrunk at the sound of his name—how can it be that all these produced the same results with their message, and drew men with the glow of enthusiasm and child-like faith into the kingdom? I will tell you. It is because something has lain beneath all the forms in which this principle has been presented to the world, a something that Nicodemus and Cardinal Manning and John Wesley and D. L. Moody all knew. It is not the form, but the fact, that matters, and I will tell you the fact. It is that in every man there is a latent Christ. The touch of the Divine Spirit wakens that Christ within and brings Him into union with the Christ above. As Origen so sweetly put it centuries ago, “Christ sleeps in the soul of every man as He slept in the boat on the Lake of Galilee, and He wakes at the cry of penitence to still the storm of sinful passion in our lives.”

I said just now “a latent Christ.” Will you permit me a very homely figure to illustrate what I mean? Two or three days ago, laid aside for the moment by temporary indisposition, I watched

from the window of my bedroom the swaying of the branches of some apple trees in the wintry blast. I could remember so well when those same apple trees had almost obscured the view from the window by their very luxuriance of summer beauty, now bare and dead, with no suggestion of the spring-time about them. One looked with something of regret for a departed glory. Then I remembered that inside everyone of those gnarled branches, beneath the seeming deadness, all the foliage, the blossoms, the fruit of the spring and summer days are latent now. The warmth and brightness of a day to be will call them forth, but it could not call them forth if they were already dead. There is no man in this congregation, however sunken in sin or however hardened, coarse, foul, unspiritual in his attitude and desire, but there is, though you may never suspect it, within him the image of the Christ that is to be.

This is the great truth that underlies our text. Except such a man be quickened from above he cannot see the kingdom of God. But if he sees, if he knows, if the heart be flung open like the poor in spirit, the very fact that he knows of his need, the very fact that his desire is single, brings him God, lifts him into the spiritual kingdom and the sunshine of the Father's glory. Here is the principle on which all true spiritual experience is based.

We know what it is, do we not, even in ordinary human life, to have our attitude toward the world and men and things completely changed? There are not a few here who have passed through such experiences, and they mean more than you can readily say. Here is a young lover, perhaps, whose whole attitude to life and its problems has been changed because a good woman has come into his heart. Let no one smile at such a change of outlook, for it means a radical change of character too, if that man be a man indeed. The world is a bigger place to him, and he is a bigger man. And what is more, his kinship to the great heart of humanity is purer, nobler than it was before. Because a great love has entered his life it seems as if that man's whole being has been stirred and his soul has been awakened, he has entered into a new world.

It is only a figure, but it comes very near to what the Master means by the principle here. So is it with every young mother. Do you remember the hour when you looked for the first time upon the face of your babe? No one can describe to you, and no one who has not passed through the experience can understand as well as you, just how you felt, not only to that tiny morsel of humanity, but to all the world that contained it, after you had been born anew into an experience you had never known before. And yet young lover and young

mother both were lover and mother potentially before the great experience was born. You are what you are, and you know what you know, and you see what you see, because you were capable of being quickened into it. So it is with this great experience of the kingdom of God. Every man who is quickened from above can enter in, but he cannot see it till the quickening touch has come. Yet a quickening touch can wake him and stir his soul into a longing for God, proof that God was there before.

I want every man in this church to-night to realise that, and never let go the thought that you are made for God, and without God you shall never attain to what you are meant to be. Dimly you have glimpses occasionally of what it might be to enter that promised land where the redeemed walk with those who have been chosen of God like them. There is no barrier to warn you from it. You can enter in if you will. Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the pure in heart—theirs is the kingdom, they shall see. It is a surrender of heart and life to what you know to be the touch of heaven, the hand of the Master divine. It may come to you in any one of a thousand ways. I would place no restriction upon the experience of any man, or try to force it into a mould of mine, for I know God can declare Himself in many ways to ordinary everyday human experience. A Crom-

well wrestling in the seventeenth century with this great fact, true in every age and just the same in every age, would not have been understood by many who are entering into the Kingdom through the doors of the Welsh revival, yet that Cromwell, when the throes were over and the sombre crisis was past, magnificent man that he was, could say, with the humility of a little child, "He that was Paul's Christ is my Christ too." John Bunyan, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, with all the devils of hell, as he felt it, gathered about him to drag his soul to perdition, was long in seeing the morning light, but it came, and when it came it made just such a character as Evan Roberts of to-day, and in many churches of this land prayers are going up this night that God will pour out upon England of that Spirit which in ages past has quickened men into the kingdom of God. Prayer will be answered, never fear, but let no man suppose he can dictate to God just how it will be answered. It is not the revival meeting merely that will effect what is sought. Some men will come in solitariness, with no companion and no guide but the heavenly Father Himself, and some will come with the enthusiasm and the magnetism of the multitude to help them, but they come, if so be that they have opened heart and mind and will to the inflow of the Spirit of God. My experience is not that of the revival meeting. I can-

not remember the hour when I could say that I had passed from death unto life, but "I know Whom I have believed." There was no earthly shock, there was no explosion of desire and conviction; but it was like a flower opening to the sun. All the same, it was quickening from above. And so it has been wherever any man has been born into the kingdom of God, sudden or slow, but as certainly the touch of the divine, be it a Cromwell, a Bunyan, a Spurgeon, a Moody, a Roberts, or one of those quiet souls who in a solitary corner give themselves and all they hope to be into the keeping of the Redeemer of mankind.

This introduces me to the illustration for the sake of which I preach this sermon, and I want you to listen to it with patience and sympathy. Someone wrote to me in the past week to say that some had come, through the teaching from this pulpit, to take a new view of Christ, my Lord, not that they had come to take my view, but they had come to take my attitude. The writer said, incredible as it may seem to you, that although they had a truly religious nature and a strong desire to know the truth concerning God the Father and His un-failing love, yet the spectacle of the woe of the world, the complexity of the problem of human depravity, and the consideration of the experience of human suffering from day to day, from year

to year, from age to age, the horror and the mourning of history, held them back—they could not see the Father's face, and even the Christ they regarded with a half-contemptuous feeling. Here in the church they learned to feel that that dim, distant, seemingly pusillanimous character was living, perhaps reigning, and whether reigning or no, worthy to reign. They found that some people loved Him, that some people trusted Him, that some people were living in the power of His might, and this has brought them, as it were, into a new region of experience; and still they do not know what to think about the claims of that Christ, beyond this, He is the best that human eyes ever saw, He belongs to humanity, He is as the very soul of it, He is enshrined in its heart, Jesus, our Master, our Leader, our King. Mark, do not read too much into that. They could not say for certain whether Christ uttered the words of my text or no. They are standing on the borderland of a new experience, and looking in, but they have seen something. They have seen the Christ that was worthy to be enthroned, they have seen that that Christ, if only by the infection of His personality, has been transforming the life and the experience of human kind for nineteen centuries. That is what they have seen. What am I to call it? This means a new attitude toward life itself. This means a new and wistful gaze toward heaven.

They have seen because they have been quickened ; surely they are not far from the kingdom of God. Nay, have they not entered it ?

A friend of mine to whom I spoke about this experience told me, somewhat puzzled at such an attitude, how far different it was from his own. He seems to see the Christ as it were in his daily walk. He appeals to Him from his desk in the counting-house. He is just the norm, the standard of his moral life. He is the object of his prayers, He is the goal of his faith. He said : " Oh, Christ is everything to me. Why cannot my Christ be everything to them ? " My answer is to you as to him : Christ has come to you with a vision of which no man can rob you, and of the power and the reality of which you need not to be convinced. But the Christ has come to these also, like the gentle rain in the spring-time upon the timid flowers, bidding them open to the summer sun, and they are as truly quickened from heaven as ever you have been.

Some will understand what I have said and some will not ; but I leave it there. God knows for whom it was meant. Perhaps the man who has found it most difficult up to this moment to believe that there was a God to care for him, or a Spirit to quicken, or a Christ in Whom to believe, will realise as his heart burns within him that there is a Someone who talks with him by the way.

“He seems to hear a heavenly friend
And through thick veils to apprehend
A labour working to an end.”

I have the fullest sympathy with everyone who is doing anything for Christ to-day, in calling men to Him or witnessing for Him; but I care very little about the form in which the call is expressed. I care everything for the fact that there is a latent Christ in every man and a Divine spirit that quickens him into the kingdom of God. They tell me that some months ago a young Scotsman, who had been blind all his life, suddenly, by a marvellous operation, received his sight. They say that to that young man the world is another place. He wanders daily up and down in scenes with which you and I are so familiar that we do not even call them beautiful, and he sees a radiance that was hidden from ordinary everyday eyes that have gazed upon them all their lives. “Oh,” he says, “the world is so beautiful! Who would have thought it was so beautiful?” Apt figure of the experience of the man who has found his God through the touch of a quickening Spirit.

“Lord, I was blind : I could not see
In Thy marred visage any grace ;
But now the brightness of Thy face
In radiant vision dawns on me.”

I am unwilling to sit down while one in the congregation may be feeling that what I have said

is no concern of his. It has everything to do with you. It is not the number of facts you know, the number of propositions you can declare, the evangelical facts of which you have made yourself master—it is not that; it is to believe, to realise, that your whole nature was meant to be the tabernacle of the holy God, that already within you is the capacity for the divine, that the Christ only waits to respond to the call of penitence: “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

THE CLEANSING BLOOD.

“Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.”—*Hebrews ix. 22.*

X.

THE CLEANSING BLOOD.

THE second part of our text is often quoted without the first, and on that account perhaps is the more familiar to the ordinary student of Scripture. But the two ought never to be considered apart, for they are mutually dependent expressions of one idea. It is ours to discover what that idea is. First, let us be sure of our terms. May I re-read to you the Authorised Version of our text, follow it with the Revised Version, and then add a paraphrase in more ordinary and everyday English than either. The Authorised Version is this:—

“Almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission.”

The Revised Version reads:—

“According to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission.”

We may paraphrase it thus: “According to the

law of Moses, I may almost say, all things that pertain to the service of God, which is the service of righteousness, which is one with the service of man, are cleansed with blood, and apart from the outpouring of the blood of sacrifice sin cannot be done away."

What is it the writer seeks to convey? Turn to verses 13 and 14, and you will see. Again I quote from the Revised Version:—

"If the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your consciences from dead works to serve the living God?"

Observe, there is no suggestion of a victim offered to change the attitude of God to the worshippers; the victim is offered, as it were, to cleanse their consciences from dead works to serve the living God. Remember that the writer is speaking to Hebrews, and employs terms with which they were familiar. He evidently wishes to establish a parallel between the sacrifice of Christ and that to which Hebrews were accustomed under the Mosaic dispensation. What was the meaning of the Mosaic system of sacrifice? Possibly some of you have quite an incorrect notion as to what it really was. You may suppose that an innocent victim

was selected—bull, goat, or heifer—slain and offered in sacrifice upon the altar in order to propitiate the Divine Being for the sins of the people, one and all. In this you would be mistaken; there is no suggestion in this Scripture of anything of the kind. Turn again to verse 19 in this same chapter:—

“When every commandment had been spoken by Moses unto all the people according to the law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying: This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded to you-ward.”

But in chapter x. 4 we read thus:—

“It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. Wherefore when He (that is, Christ) cometh into the world, He saith: Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body didst thou prepare for me; in whole burnt offering and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do Thy will, O God.”

In verse 15 of the same chapter we also read:—

“The Holy Ghost also beareth witness to us, for after He hath said, This is the covenant that I will make with them. After those days, said the Lord, I will put my laws on their hearts, and upon

their minds also will I write them; and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

The truth is we have here no suggestion of a substitutionary victim; what we have instead is a symbolic rite; it is similar to what we observe in the Lord's Supper, setting forth something that is too great for language. The people of Israel did not receive a victim from God to be punished instead of them; the animal they slew they *gave* to God. It was as though by this symbol they offered themselves; they attached no significance to the offering of the animal, beyond what it reminded them of. It was as though they were saying: This is Israel, this is our blood that we are shedding; just as the blood of the body of an animal is shed, so Israel in its conflict with sin, in its struggle for righteousness, which is the service of God, is shedding the blood of the soul. I can find no other term to express what is here meant; it is a scriptural term, too: "He poured out *his soul* unto death." The nation was as one in this sacrifice; individual responsibility for sin had hardly arisen in the national consciousness; this was a collective act; the high priest acted for all the people, and it was not the death of the animal that made any difference whatever; it was the attitude of the people towards the great fact whether they were serving sin or serving righteousness. Just as the animal poured out his blood so they were to resist unto blood, striving against sin.

Now, concerning the sacrifice of Christ, may we not equally be mistaken sometimes and cherish false ideas, as we may about the Mosaic economy? There are at least two false ideas current amongst us to-day concerning the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—first, that except Christ had suffered and died, God the Father would have reprobated and destroyed all human kind, but He has been pacified by the shedding of the sacred blood of an innocent victim. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” He must punish someone, so He punished the Lord Jesus, a willing victim. I need not say that this view is both unscriptural and untrue. God does not need to change His attitude to men; no sacrifice has ever been offered that effected such a change; the death of Christ makes no difference in the purpose of the Father in the redemption of the race. It would be immoral if it could, and God would be doing wrong. None can be punished but the guilty. Saviourhood suffers with the sinner that it may save him; it is never punished for him. The second false idea is this: that the shedding of the blood of Christ will somehow—no one has ever been able to say how—free a sinner from the consequences of his guilt if he accept by faith the proffered grace. The New Testament nowhere says so; the evangelical truth strikes much deeper. The facts of life are against such a belief as I have described, and so is the

moral sense of humanity. And yet there is a sense in which the suffering of Christ for sin, and all suffering for righteousness' sake, does do away with the consequences of sin, but not until the sin itself is gone. There is thus a truth in substitution—a truth in which you and I may be called to share—and we must try to see what it is. These two false ideas find no support in the Gospel of Christ, nor in the teaching of our Lord nor of His apostles. Let us see where the truth is really to be found.

A few days ago in a Midland town a murderer paid the penalty of his crime. He had slain in a foul and callous fashion a poor little child. In the dock, when he was sentenced, the unrepentant savage cursed the judge and jury and the parents of the little one he had killed. But on the day before his execution he penned a letter to the bereaved parents asking for their forgiveness, saying that he repented of his deed, that he was going to be with Jesus, and he trusted to meet them in heaven. Well, I cannot but feel that if it were true that this murderer takes his place forthwith by the side of Stephen and Paul and the martyrs of the New Testament and the saints of Christian history, somehow less than justice would be done in the economy of God. This man has rather repented of the consequences than of the sin. He never dreamed of being able to avoid the first con-

sequence, his own death—a life for a life—but he feared that there might be more upon the other side of the veil, maybe; and do you suppose it possible that a man who has gone out of this world stained with the blood of a fellow creature, and capable of such a deed as this man had performed, will to-morrow change his nature so rapidly and completely that he shall be of the blood-washed throng around the throne? Because I do not, and I find no support for such a supposition in this Gospel. The mere claim upon the merits of someone other than myself will never save me, and never was meant to save me, from the consequences of my own guilt. Being *capable* of the sin, I am *guilty* of it till I am incapable of it, and that spells suffering until the change is wrought. There are men here, perhaps, who have made shipwreck of their career; wine and women have ruined thousands in this fair England of ours, and the tale of victims is not yet told. Do I address one such? Sir, you have repented in sackcloth and ashes, I know. What woke you to a proper perception of what you are? Was it that the world went well with you? Not so, but that the finger of God was heavy upon you. You have reaped as you have sown. In your body, in your circumstances, in your destiny, is the verdict upon your sin written large. You know that repentance has not given you back that which you forfeited nor put back

and told over again the history of your wasted years. We feel, do we not, every one of us, to the depths of our heart, that this is not only true of one man here and another there, but of all men and of every sin? Am I addressing the victim of such a man—one who has loved not wisely, but too well? Time has been when you drank of the sweets of life, like the careless butterfly fluttering from flower to flower; but you have discovered to-day, you sad-hearted Magdalen of the twentieth century, that moral weakness is punished as certainly and severely as moral depravity ever is. We can make no excuse to God for what we are by saying that another has wrought us ill or been our tempter. God will strike down the tempter—"Vengeance is mine; I will repay"—but everyone of us is impregnable within the citadel of our own being till we ourselves open the door. Verily, our God is a God who, because of His very mercy and love, will by no means clear the guilty.

Again, may it be true that I address some who dread to repent of their yesterday because of what they must do to-morrow as a consequence of their very penitence? Do you ever dream that repentance will spare you? If you told a lie years ago that ruined another life, that lie must be atoned for to-morrow, though it never can be atoned for in its fulness—no wrong ever is—by the truth which you must tell. Your heart has to be laid bare;

you must be honest with the man you wronged as you have been honest with God—shall I say, as you would have to be honest with God if you dared to repent? But why is it you do not dare? Because you know you lay your sins upon no scapegoat, you can avoid none of the consequences of your own ill. You are marching straight through a gateway that leads to the outpoured blood and the altar of fire, when you turn with penitent heart to God. Penitential peace and penitential pain meet in penitential shedding of blood.

Thus, brethren, the two ideas which I have characterised as false ring false, do they not, to human experience? God is not changed by the offering of a scapegoat; man cannot escape the consequences of his wrong by piling them upon another; and if in this life men are visited with the retribution which is the just sequence of their wrong-doing, think you it is all over and done with when the gate of death has closed upon the retreating soul? I trow not. What, then, is the truth? Here it is—I cannot put it better than it is phrased in the words of my text:—According to the law, I may almost say, all things that pertain to the service of God, the service of truth, the service of right, must be cleansed with blood; and apart from the outpouring of blood, the blood of the soul, sin is never done away. It is the old, old law that lies at the root of all moral endeavour; you have made

acquaintance with it already, though perhaps no preacher has ever stated it before to you. In human history the saviours and the penitents, the innocent and the guilty, all alike must shed their soul's blood for the doing away of sin. The suffering of the saviours of the world is redemptive, the suffering of the sinners is penal and purgative, but their purpose is one in the economy of God. It is the saviours who always suffer first; sinners begin to suffer in the shadow of saviourhood. Every martyr dies for the race, every hero fights for the race, every saint suffers for the race, and without the outpouring of blood there is no remission. A Carlyle, for example, or a Ruskin writes a book, into which he puts his very soul; what does the prophet write for? Is it for money? If so, Carlyle had died a richer man, and Ruskin had not made such haste to get rid of a fortune. No, these men are not producing for a market, they are giving themselves for the world; it is their life's blood, their deeper self, in these heroes and saints and seers of the race that goes to the making of good. A G. F. Watts paints a picture which is a message of the Eternal to his time; why does he paint it? Is it that it may sell? It may never be sold, yet the message is delivered, and the prophet has discharged his task, and the burden of his commission is given back to God; he has put *himself* into his picture, given himself for the life of the world.

Thus it has been since the world began. Before there was a Cross of Calvary set up men were pouring out their blood for the life of the race—the old, old law that without shedding of blood is no loosening of the fetters from the souls of men.

But what then are we to say about Jesus? Just this. I would put Jesus in no second place. We cannot speak of Jesus as hero, saint, or martyr; these terms will not fit Him; He is too great for them, too utterly unique. He stands in a relationship to the race which no hero, saint, or martyr has ever sustained. Jesus is no hero, saint, or martyr, but He is the maker, the fountain, and the focus of heroism, saintship, and martyrdom throughout all time. Jesus was stretched upon the Cross of Calvary and died there, and the simple fact that there ever was a Cross of Calvary means that the oblation of Christ has become the norm and the standard for the victory of right over wrong, of love over hatred, of good over evil, of joy over pain. It must needs be that the Christ must suffer, and that He enter into His glory. Take away the Cross of Christ from the history of the world, and what have you left? Not much which we can see to be worthy of the service due from humanity to God. In Hebrews xi., the chapter next but one to that from which our text is taken, I have an illustration ready to hand. Here

is one who ere Christ was born was crucified with Christ:—

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming *the reproach of Christ* (remarkable phrase), greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”

Moses is the very law-giver instanced and named in Chapter ix. as the representative of God in the sprinkling of the people with the covenant blood. I wonder how many of the people of Israel, on the first day when Moses came forth from the holy place bearing in his hands the blood of the slain victim, and sprinkled the vessels of the temple and the congregation therewith, thought of Moses himself as a victim offered for them to righteousness, to God. Moses was a truer victim than the blood of the goat, or the heifer, or the bull; for Moses might have done other with his life than he did. It was laid upon the altar of Christ before ever he heard of a Christ; and, what is more, it *was* Christ who in His servant poured out His soul unto death. The things of God were cleansed with blood, with the soul blood of a righteous man, and

without the shedding of blood in the deepest sense of that word—not of the body, but of the soul—there had been no Israel, it would have perished in slavery and sin.

And in the Christian centuries can we see anything like unto this illustration of the sacrifice of Christ? You are all familiar with the Byronic phrase, “butchered to make a Roman holiday.” There was a time when your forefathers fought with each other in the arena of the Coliseum at Rome simply that emperor and populace might be pleased with the shedding of their blood; until one day, one notable day in the history of mankind, a simple monk leaped into the arena of death bearing in his hand an uplifted cross, and bade them stay; and the infuriated onlookers cried to the gladiators to cut him down. He fell, but there were no more gladiatorial combats in that arena at Rome. The blood of Telemachus had sanctified the spot, the Cross of Christ had conquered; in that a man had laid down his life, Christ had poured out His blood again. I am using here no fancy phrase when I say Christ laid down His life again. This is Christ: wherever humanity struggles against sin, wherever saviourhood lays itself upon the altar of sacrifice, there is Christ dying for His own. Nor does it always follow that the blood of the body has to be shed. If so, some of us would be poor witnesses for Christ, for we shall never be asked

to shed ours. But let us take our stand beside a John Hampden refusing to pay ship money to a Stuart king, or a John Wesley preaching on his father's tomb, and I think you will admit with me, however little either of these men may have seen of the issues, that they were fighting the battle of God. The Christ in them shed His blood once more for the doing away of the wrongs of the world. And across the seas, in that new country of America, to which so many of us have turned our eyes in hope and confidence, the same great principle was lived out but yesterday in the person of a man who forced open the gate through which the slaves of the South trooped to freedom. When John Brown, going to execution, said, with words of sorrow, "Blood must be shed for the sins of this nation," he knew himself but to be the advance guard of the national offering that was to be made. How true those words came thousands in America can bear witness to-day. The armies of the North marched to victory in the war of emancipation singing as their battle song:—

"John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
But his soul is marching on."

Without shedding of blood there is no victory over wrong; without shedding of blood there is no doing away of guilt. Saviour and penitent alike, guilty nation or guilty individual, Christ or sinner, we are identical in this: the blood has to be shed or

the sin remains. The battle of righteousness is not fought with rose water. Spiritual manhood is born in the furnace. "Without shedding of blood is no remission."

Suppose I address some, as I doubtless do, who have never thought of my text in this light before; would it help you if I were to remind you that in the thought of God both Saviour and penitent here may be shedding the cleansing blood, and therefore Christ is offering Himself again? Here is a mother who waits at the prison door for her boy who has been enduring the penalty of his own wrong-doing. The world jeers at the sound of his name; he expects neither pity nor pardon from society—but the mother, what of her? The culprit is suffering no more than she, they are one; her life is willingly laid down for him, and, in so doing, if there be aught of promise in him, any dawning of new manhood say, his soul, too, will be born again. The world may never know, but there is One Who must know, and that is Christ; for, in the redemptive sorrow of the mother and the penitential sorrow of the boy, Christ is present and endures. "Without shedding of blood is no remission."

St. Paul speaks of penitential sorrow as dying with Christ. Dying with Christ may be a terribly painful thing for the man with a black record, but to die with Christ is to rise with Christ. Without

shedding of blood sin cannot be done away. We shall gather around the Lord's table presently, most of us I trust: will you hear in the Master's voice a newer ring and a newer significance if I say that in this symbolic act Christ is present, not in the elements, but in your heart and your experience? Christ is no more in the bread and the wine than there was redemptive value in the slain victim held in the hands of Moses, but there (in your hearts) is the presence of Christ. Some of you are going out to-day or to-morrow to some stern discipline which you might avoid if you would, but your deeper self, your nobler manhood and womanhood, says, "No; God wills this act of moral heroism, God has assigned it to me, and I will not shrink." Once again, therefore, Christ's body is broken, Christ's blood is shed. Such pains as yours are the salvation of the world. In you, and such as you, the blood of Christ is being shed to cleanse mankind from all sin.

Listen to the voice Divine once more, you who are penitents. You men who are here in shadow and in shame because of the remembrance of your deeds of yesterday, are you sorry? Would you gladly suffer that the unsullied innocence of youth might come again? Then it is a godly sorrow that worketh repentance. Think what that ushers you into. You are uplifted, accepted in the passion of Christ; it is Jesus who has laid the stripes

upon you; your suffering is purgative, as the suffering of all saviours is redemptive; and the Christ so identifies Himself with you and me and all mankind that it is as though He were laid upon the altar with you. All human agony and contrition and shame, all love, compassion, and sacrifice, this, this is the cleansing blood; this is shed for the life of the world. It is the Christ in every man that makes him sorrow for sin; it is the Christ in any man that turns him into a saviour. And thus it is that Jesus said, as He saw the Cross looming in the distance, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

THE SEED OF ABRAHAM.

“But thou, Israel, art my servant Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.”—*Isaiah xli. 8.*

“Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father : for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”—*Matthew iii. 9.*

XI.

THE SEED OF ABRAHAM

THERE is between these two passages an ascertainable relation, which, I trust, we shall assist each other to discover. The juxtaposition of the two texts is no arbitrary one; each of these sentences illustrates a great underlying principle, a mode of thought suggested in the Old Testament and completed in the New. We might have chosen from both books other passages which would equally well have set forth the truth which it is mine to declare this morning, but we could not have chosen, I think, any fitter sentences in exposition of what the two speakers respectively mean. Before we attempt to combine them, may I ask your indulgence while I attempt a separate exegesis?

In the passage which we have read from the book of Isaiah is exhibited the greatest element in the Israelitish national consciousness. Apparently these people never forgot their vocation as the children of Abraham. Sometimes they attributed

more importance to it, sometimes less. When the nation was at its best they spiritualised the ideal; when it was at its worst they materialised it, but they never wholly ignored it. The book of Isaiah is one of the richest parts of the Old Testament, and from the first sentence to the last this idea of the vocation of Israel is suggested or implied therein. Here is a prophet speaking in a stern tone with the purpose of heartening the people who were listening to him. See how he does it. In the chapter which precedes the one whence our text is taken you remember (because it is probably more familiar to you than the forty-first is) what the opening sentences are: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, because she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." The last verse of the chapter is more beautiful still: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

These, then, form the exordium of our text. We see the mood in which Isaiah speaks, and the tenderness which is evident in his message. It is as though he would say to Israel: "You have passed through a severe testing time, but you have

not ceased to be the people of God. Indeed, the testing time was permitted because you are never to be anything else than the chosen ones, God's Israel. You have Abraham for your father, and the covenant which God made with Abraham He will keep with you." "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

In the light of this Old Testament consciousness let us now look at the passage which we have chosen from the New. Isaiah and John are both heralds; there is at least this similarity between them, that they both come as the bearers of good tidings concerning a better day. But they are different in this: while Isaiah speaks with the gorgeous magnificence of Oriental symbolism, and his message is one full of comfort and tenderness, the words of St. John are utterly unadorned; rugged and grim is the speech of this child of the desert. He comes less with a message of comfort than with one of rebuke; and yet, like Isaiah, he is the herald of a glorious day. He, too, is standing forth with the object of heartening his people and preparing them for the advent of One greater than he. But the people are not ready for his message, nor for the blessing which he announces. And so his words to them are words

of warning, especially, shall I say, to the Pharisees. The people and their leaders had been too much inclined to content themselves with making much of the tradition of the covenant of God with Abraham, and they thought comparatively little of what was required from them in the keeping of it. "O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." The Pharisees were conspicuous for two particular vices; and, let me say, in parenthesis, that Pharisees were by no means in their entirety bad men. There were many sincere men in their ranks—probably the majority were sincere—and yet Jesus, like John, had more difficulty with the Pharisees than with any other class in the community. For these reasons. First, they trusted in their own righteousness and despised others. Their chief sin was that of spiritual pride; but another was, they believed in the externals of religion rather than in change of heart. They insisted much upon their lineage: here we are the chosen people, the descendants of Abraham—will not God keep His word to him? What part or lot has the race of mankind in this, which is a special privilege of Israel? John's reply to them is: "Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father." Why should God trouble to show His favour to men like you, for you are morally

different from Abraham? God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Now that we have together got into what I may call the climate of our two texts—and I think we have discovered now what a bearing they have upon one another—shall we spend a little more time in discovering what John the Baptist means by saying, “God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham”? I have before now heard an exegesis of the following kind, and it is not a modern one only: “Oh, it is obvious that St. John meant that the hearts around him might be changed by his glorious message, that God would give to these men a heart of flesh in place of a heart of stone, and then they would be children of Abraham indeed.” Well, the inference is not unjustifiable, but I do not think it is correct. I believe that St. John meant exactly and literally what he said: “God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” To believe that he meant it literally adds force to the warning and the appeal. What he meant, then, was something like this: It is in the power of God to breathe the breath of life into these rocks of the desert, that they should become living souls; and if so, it is conceivable they would be better men than you and worthier successors of Abraham, the friend of God. For who was, what was, this Abraham? If you turn to Hebrews xi. you will read a

Christian description of the man and his character: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise, for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Of this kind was this father of his people, this friend of God, Abraham. It has been questioned, I need not remind you, whether there ever was such a character in history. Good and devout Old Testament scholars are inclined to question the historicity of Abraham, and to say (you need not feel alarmed at the assertion) that possibly he stands rather for a national idea, a focus of the national consciousness, and symbol of the covenant between God and Israel, than that he was an actual historical character. I take a different view; I believe that Abraham was a living, breathing man, just as much as the author of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" was—a living force. It is true, as some scholars would tell you, no doubt, there are other pens and other voices suggested in the 'Iliad' than those of Homer, but there was a Homer, or there would never have been an "Iliad." It is possible that Israel did make of

Abraham a symbol of the covenant between God and Israel, a focus of the national consciousness, a grand idea, but there was a man to make the idea and the focus and the symbol and the consciousness possible. As I see him, here is the man. Cast your eye back along the line of history till its dawning morning is reached, and you will see sitting in a tent by himself on the borders of an eastern desert one like an Arab chief of the present day. Compared with you, my friend, this Abraham, this Abram, as he then was, understood little about the meaning of life, little about the being of God; his was spiritual poverty, indeed, compared with that of the most simple man or woman in this assembly. Perhaps it would not be altogether inapt if I were to say his acquaintance with his religion was derived from something similar to that practised by the natives of the Soudan at the present hour. Here is this Arab chief—I use the word Arab simply as an illustration—this Semitic nomad, sitting, thinking, by himself: Is this the way to worship God? Must it always be by abomination, and cruelty, and lust? Is it all for greed of gain? Is God a kind of devil who must be placated? Is this religion, is this worship, is this righteousness? And as he ponders he resolves: I must leave this society, and I will try whether I cannot live out what I am feeling now. Abraham saw a vision

and heard a voice, and by faith he went out, not knowing whither he went, trusting only that the voice which had spoken to him in his prayers was one with the hand that should guide him. Momentous results followed that far-off choice. It was the dawning of a great hour in which Israel was born, and with Israel the Messiah, and with the Messiah the Gospel under which you and I live our lives to-day.

Here, then, is the Abraham of whose seed these Pharisees claimed to be. They had not his moral courage, nor his noble spirit; these were not of the kind who would have gone out in pursuit of a spiritual ideal. These were men who had hardened into insensibility, who by their lives denied the spiritual idea Abraham had bequeathed to them, and therefore the Baptist's remonstrance was apt indeed. "Think not to say, we have Abraham to our father." "You are not of the spiritual lineage of Abraham; you would never dare for God; you are content with the grovelling things, your gaze is never lifted to the eternal. God could raise up another Abraham, yea, of these stones he could raise up children worthier than you."

As an illustration of what the fiery, indomitable prophet of the desert meant, let me remind you of something, perhaps, that may have crossed your lips but yesterday. Looking upon the degenerate

son of a noble sire, what was it you remarked to your companion? "His only recommendation is that he is his father's son." Any worthless profligate who soils a noble name and brings degradation upon the record of a noble race receives and deserves the reprobation of honest men. What you say about him is: This is no descendant of the noble dead; he has no right to bear the name; in the eternal justice it were better if he made way for another. Dr. Karl Peters, the German explorer, has published a book recently, which he calls "England and the English," in which he discusses us and our ways. He is appreciative on the whole. In one place he pokes a little fun at us on this wise. He says, in effect, "There are faddists in England who would advocate any theory, however wild, that would minister to the national sense of importance and justify the desire of aggrandisement. Amongst such notions is that of wishing to be identified with the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel." That is no strange idea to you, I suppose. The motive, says Dr. Peters, is quite clear. Israel was the chosen people; prove, if you can, that England is Israel, and you have proved that England is the chosen people, and therefore justified in appropriating the whole earth! You smile at the quaint conceit of the German writer, but there is something in our human nature that responds with avidity to illicit

appeals of that kind. The question whether England is Israel is not worth discussing, believe me. If you could prove it to-morrow, some John the Baptist might rise and tell you you are out of the spiritual succession altogether. This is merely the negative side of the question. The seed of Abraham in spirit and in truth are those who hear the word of God speaking within their own hearts and rise and go forth and obey.

Hear what Jesus has to say on this theme, in John viii. 39. If Jesus is correctly reported by one who at any rate knew Him well, addressing the indignant Jews, He says: "I speak that which I have seen with My father, and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham." All the great souls of history, God's called ones, God's men, can be put into the category in which Jesus stood when He spoke those words. Remember, they are not always recognised as such, but they are there, and our moral consciousness recognises where they ought to be. All the rest of mankind must find a different category. We can classify easily the men who are of the quality of Abraham. Did these Pharisaic

time-servers, these bigoted Jews, who were questioning Jesus with the object of destroying Him, really think that they stood in the succession of him who was the friend of God? Verily they did, but the consciousness of humanity since has put them right. We know now who are of the lineage of Abraham. An Ambrose, in the early years of Christianity, a rough soldier, is chosen by the people who know him and his character to be their bishop; and now as prelate of Milan it is the duty of this erstwhile soldier to turn from the church door the blood-stained emperor who had been his commander. He dare not do otherwise, for he is serving a greater than the emperor: here speaks the seed of Abraham. An Anselm comes from the cloister to be Archbishop of Canterbury; no more than Ambrose does he seek the office, he comes forth at the call of God. Reluctantly, it may be, he turns his face away from that which had been his spiritual home, and takes up the duty thrust upon him by the importunity of a wicked king. The monarch and his aiders and abettors in wrong suppose that this weak man, this monk whose business in life is to pray in a cloister, can be easily handled; they shall rule as they please in England, now that meekness sits on the throne of Augustine. But they reckoned wrongly; the strongest man on earth is the spiritual man. All alone Anselm

faced barbaric-materialistic England headed by its sovereign, and vanquished it all alone. Abraham, Ambrose, Anselm—souls of one quality these, men who come out at the call of God *all alone*, yet not alone; these are the friends of God.

But yesterday, as it were, a William Tyndale, a George Wishart, a John Wycliffe, a Richard Baxter, taking not counsel with flesh and blood, came forth from what was spiritually speaking the house of their nativity, all alone, into an unknown and untried world, leaving comfort and preferment behind them; some of them to the martyr's death, all of them to suffering, ignominy, and shame. Do they need pity? By no means: these were of the seed of Abraham. And time would fail me to tell, as in Hebrews xi. we have been reminded, of others of whom the world is not worthy. And who knows? God knows, maybe, that in this church this morning there are some of the lineage of Abraham of whom the world will never hear. The rest of us, perhaps, in the gaze of heaven, may have to be put in another category—the category of those who have not dared for justice and right and truth. But the seed of Abraham shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father. Listen to Jesus again. He is addressing a company of His own countrymen, a crowded audience—greater, maybe, than this of this morning. His mother and His

brethren seek Him at the door, and cannot come at Him for the press. He does not repudiate them, but he enlarges the family circle. "Who is My mother?" he says to the silent and expectant assembly, "and who are My brethren?" He did not say, "She is not My mother," neither did He fanatically declare, "Those are not My brethren"; but, looking round at the simple men who sat about Him, men of whom the world took small account, peasant fishermen of Galilee, He said, "Behold My mother and My brethren: for whosoever shall do the will of God the same is My brother and sister and mother." The true seed of Abraham are these.

There is one more thought which before I close is suggested in our second text. It is this. There is something contained in the very phrase "these stones," which I think was not merely accidental. The prophet knew well what he meant; the stones are unpromising material. Yesterday I spent part of my time in answering a letter sent to me by a young man who attends here; it was put somewhat in this wise: "How can I know of a certainty that I belong to the Lord Christ?" The writer wrote like a true man, as I doubt not he would speak like a true man. "I have small sympathy," he said, "with rhapsodies and lip-religion, but I do wish to discover the right way and walk in that. I have often

prayed that the experiences of which I read as taking place in Wales and at the Albert Hall, and in the life of the Augustines and Bunyans and Spurgeons of history, might have been mine; but God has never spoken to me that way, and I feel somehow perhaps that there may be something wrong with me, and I know it not; how can I *know* I belong to the Lord Christ?" Through Him I speak to all such as he. Conversion is a turning from sin and a turning towards God. Get firmly hold of that fact. Feelings are an endowment which may or may not accompany it; but the man whose heart is right with holiness and truth, whose face is turned that way, is of the seed of Abraham and the friend of God, however little he may feel himself worthy of the call.

I want you to look at this old Abraham again for a moment as we did at the beginning of the sermon. See him sitting, thinking, weighing well the question what was to be done with his life, and I want you to recognise, what is the very truth, that Abraham had far less to guide him than you. He heard the same voice as you, but it had not told the world as much then as it has told it since. When you take up this Old Testament again and read of the wonders achieved by the heroes of old, remember that the voice that spake to them spake within their own hearts, and not without, just as it speaks now to you. This

Abraham heard a voice, and he said he would obey it; he could trust it; he established his covenant with God, and it never failed him. Was he right or was he wrong? Because that voice, that very same voice, is speaking in your heart to-day. How shall I know I am of the seed of Abraham? Is my face turned the way his was? How shall I know I belong to the Lord Christ? Here is my charter: "Whosoever shall do the will of God (even seek to do it), the same is my brother and sister and mother." Jesus will never turn away from His own spiritual kindred.

Yet there may be one more experience here to which I ought to speak. There is, perhaps, a man who, as I address the young fellow and others like him who could have written that letter, says: "Ah! yes; but I have made shipwreck of my career. Such as these of whom the preacher speaks may look back upon their life and say, 'I have done the best I could with my manhood.' But I have failed; my road is strewn with the dust and ashes of vain regrets. A phrase in the text describes me well, 'The stones are the rubbish of the desert. They only serve to accentuate its desolation.' Just so; I am the stones." Well, I want you to hear a voice that I am fond of listening to—with deepest reverence be it spoken—one that spoke with authority; and I think you will agree with me it has power in it still:—John viii.

56: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad." Picture the astonishment of those Jews. "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?" Poor literalists! Abraham in his lonely desert vigil never saw Jesus; he had no foregleam of the day when Jesus should speak such words as these; but what he did have was the vision by which he saw the Son of Righteousness arising in his own heart. That was Jesus' day. The Abraham who spent his early days in a guilty household, in the midst of men who never thought of the unworthiness of serving God by lascivious rites and brutal deeds, one day said to himself, "This life has to be left behind." So soon as he had seen that he had seen Jesus' day, and he rose up and went out to meet it. And that is just what you have to do. For the same voice that spake to Abraham is speaking to the world to-day, is speaking through Jesus: "Before Abraham was I am." Children of Abraham, friends of Jesus, is not that voice speaking to you even now?

JOSHUA'S VOTIVE PRAYER.

"Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon ; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon !"—*Joshua x. 12.*

XII.

JOSHUA'S VOTIVE PRAYER.

THESE strange words have been a source of much perplexity because of the startlingly improbable nature of the event that they appear to record. The ingenuity of commentators has been much strained to account for the occurrence herein referred to, and present-day literalists are no less hard put to it to explain how the sun stood still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, without throwing the solar system out of gear. But, as I am perfectly convinced that the writer of these words would be greatly surprised if he were to listen to the discussions they have evoked, and as he never meant that they should be taken in the literal and impossible sense, we shall look together beneath them this morning, and try to discover what they signify. For, believe me, they stand for a great and beautiful thing.

The Book of Joshua in its present form dates from about two or three centuries before Christ; that is, ages after the events it records. I say in

its present form, because it is a composite document, like most of the Old Testament books; it draws upon different sources, and our text happens to be one of these. Was there a Joshua at all? The book does not say that it was written by Joshua; it is a book about Joshua. Some Old Testament scholars are disposed to say, "No; the person of that name was altogether a mythical character, like Achilles or Hector, of Homeric legend, and that which has grown up about him is part of the folklore of Israel." I find it impossible to take that view; I am just as sure that there was a Joshua as I am sure that the literal interpretation of my text is wrong. My study of history in years past has taught me this: that every forceful individuality who has entered into legend may have been greater than the legend; he never was less. There is always a man behind the tradition. That kind of history which would blot out the personality of a William Tell or a Robin Hood is wrongly written. No matter how strange the story that clusters about the heads of the heroes, the heroes must have been there to give it being. This Joshua was undoubtedly the successor of a greater still. Moses was the greatest formative influence that Israel ever had. But the campaign in which Joshua was the leader of Israel was not the only one in which they conquered Canaan. That conquest took generations, not a few months

or a few years. It may have been that Joshua, the leader of one section of the Israelitish tribes who were driving out the Canaanites before them, simply stands out as the most conspicuous hero in the long warfare. It was very much with Israel in the settlement of Canaan as with your forefathers in the settlement of this island. It was no easy matter for your forefathers to drive mine to the hills; it took generations to do it, and they never were completely expelled from this territory which we now share. You remember, too, that when the Anglo-Saxon invasion, which was followed by that of the Northmen, took place in this country, it was no great descent under one all-dominating leader. They came in tribes. There was a kingdom of the Northumbrians, whose name is perpetuated in a county; a kingdom of middle England, or Mercia; a kingdom of the North Saxons, now Norfolk; a kingdom of the South Saxons, Suffolk; a kingdom of the East Saxons, Essex; a kingdom of the Middle Saxons, where you now worship; a kingdom of Sussex; a kingdom of Kent; a kingdom of Wessex, which was presently to absorb the rest and become the kingdom of England. The great leader in any particular age against the Celts of the West or North was called the Bretwalda. The Bretwalda led the men of Middlesex and Kent, as well as the men of Northumbria, against the common foe. Pro-

bably this is the way in which Israel subdued Canaan. Joshua was the Bretwalda of Judah, and Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh and Dan. Was this half-savage chief, as some people would count him, this worshipper of Jehovah, the most conspicuous leader in an age-long campaign which had more to do with the making of history than any similar campaign in the story of mankind? I think so.

There is again a curious and instructive thing, true of Old Testament study; it is this: that the most ancient portions of the narrative are usually indicated by poetic fragments. In the Book of Joshua, that which is probably the oldest sentence in the whole compilation is our text. It is the only fragment of poetry in the whole story. For this text of mine is just a couple of lines taken out of a book that is lost, the Book of Jasher, and is the work of a poet who sang his song before the other parts of the narrative were written. "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon"—does it not sound like poetry?—"and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon." Literature always begins in poetry, such as the Nibelungenlied, the Sagas of the Northmen, the song of Beowulf, and the chant of Caedmon among your own Anglo-Saxon forefathers. Before ever pen was put to paper, men were singing the deeds of their heroes; and here is a poet singing part of the folklore of Israel, and we have just two

lines of his song. He puts into the mouth of Joshua a prayer to the powers of heaven to aid him in the great fight. "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon." The poet never intended this to be thought of as other than a figure; and, as I have already said, he would be greatly surprised if he heard of the discussions which have been written and spoken around those two lines.

Here is an illustration of what I mean. Another poet uses precisely the same figure—no less a person than our own Shakespeare. In "King John," Act iii., Scene 1, he makes the King of France speak thus on the occasion of a royal marriage:—

"This blessed day
Ever in France shall be kept festival :
To solemnise this day the glorious sun
Stays in his course and plays the alchemist,
Turning with splendour of his precious eye
The meagre, cloddy earth to glittering gold :
The yearly course that brings this day about
Shall never see it but a holiday."

Shakespeare would be surprised indeed if in the twenty-first century he were to learn that a book had been written to prove that he meant the King of France to say that the sun did stand still when a daughter of the royal house was wedded. But we need not suppose any such thing. You can get beneath the poet's figure and understand what was meant. Joshua had been sent for to recover a

territory that had been lost to Israel. "And the men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp of Gilgal, saying, 'Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly and save us and help us.' " And Joshua's reply is, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon"—may the sun of Israel never go down; the victory of Israel shall never be turned into defeat, and Israel's God must reign over this new land for ever.

And now beneath the figure can we see anything more of Joshua's own experience without necessarily drawing too much upon the imagination? I think I see two things in this poetic fragment. The ancient singer makes Joshua declare: first, an expression of the faithful determination of a brave man, his assertion of moral purpose; and, secondly, his appeal to Heaven to aid him in the realisation of that purpose. Here is the faithful determination of a brave man. To learn what it is, try to see the issues as Joshua saw them on the day of this great struggle. It is unquestionable that the tribes which were being driven out before Israel represented a fouler standard of morality and a lower idea of God than that for which Joshua and his tribesmen stood; and, as so many times in history before and since, that which was baser had to give way to that which was higher. Do not read too much into this. The chosen people did not know God as you know Him. To them He

was a tribal god; but it is their chief glory that their tribal deity was worshipped in righteousness. This Joshua knew, and for this Joshua stood. That you may realise how strongly he felt concerning it, remember the stand he took in his last years, when his last battle had been fought, and he came to say his valedictory words to Israel: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve. . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." This people Israel departed from the worship of Jehovah more than once in their history. On every such occasion they chose an easier but a baser faith. Their idolatry always meant a moral set-back, and, however little their worship of Jehovah may have meant to them in these formative days, it was a greater and a nobler thing than that which it drove out. Hence this was to Joshua, the great captain, a religious war. He was fighting for something more than a name; he was fighting for the future of a people; he was fighting for a great ethical ideal, and his whole heart and soul went into it. It was to him, as it were, a kind of crusade before crusades began, and the long conflict resembled closely the struggle of Christianity with Moham-medanism on this very ground, or the conflict with the Moors in Spain centuries afterwards. Joshua himself seems to me to bear some resemblance to the first Christian king of Jerusalem, Godfrey of Bouillon. Do you remember when Jerusalem fell

into the hands of the Crusaders, and the terrible massacre of the infidels was over, and Godfrey of Bouillon was enthroned as the first king of the Holy City, what the old warrior said as he knelt at the tomb of his Saviour? He refused to wear a crown of gold in the city where his Saviour had worn a crown of thorns, and his first act after the victory was to vow himself again in the service of the Son of Man. Why, you would say, he had a very poor idea of the Saviourhood of Christ if he vindicated it by the shedding of torrents of blood. Maybe; but for the time being this man was doing as well as he knew how in the great commission that had been entrusted to him, and (may I say it and mean it?) it was better for the world that the Cross conquered that day than the Crescent. So it was better for the world that the sword of Joshua cleared the land of Canaan of pollution, noisesomeness, and fiendish cruelty; for, even though it meant the shedding of blood, this Old Testament hero was standing for something that was morally nobler than the things he displaced. This old-time crusader was fighting his crusade before there was a Cross to fight under. This Joshua of the Old Testament is of the same type as the Christian heroes of all ages. He was vowing himself in his prayer, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon," like Godfrey praying at the Saviour's tomb.

And then, I said, in the second place, his prayer

is an appeal to heaven to win the victory, not only for him, but for all for which Israel stood. He is praying to his father's God in the spirit of the ancient song: "Unto you that fear my name, saith the Lord, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings." Now probably you and I are getting nearer to the spirit of this utterance than we were at first. We have to see the issues as Joshua saw them, to enter with something of the historic imagination into his circumstances. Now we agree that when he uttered his command, which was really a prayer, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon," he was praying, like an enthusiast, a hero, for constancy, for strength, and for victory for himself, for his people, and for their God. You and I see much further than Joshua ever saw, not of our merits, but in however small a degree, of his. "Others have laboured, and ye are entered into their labours." We fight in a cause nobler than that in which he drew the sword, but we can do no better—or, shall I say, we can do no worthier?—with our destiny than he did with his. For every task, no matter what, a certain moral exaltation is needed to lift it out of the sphere of the worldly and the commonplace. To pray with earnestness, with enthusiasm: "Sun of Righteousness, Light of Jehovah, stand thou still upon Gibeon"—to pray thus in the midst of circumstances like yours is to transform them from a conflict into a crusade.

I have mentioned more than once in this pulpit something of the life history of Henry Ward Beecher. Here is a man of the Joshua type; his whole life was a conflict. In early days, just as his ministry was beginning, he was once meditating with himself of what kind it was to be. He relates that one morning he rode out alone in that far Western country where his early work for Christ began, and came to the crossing of a stream at sundown, and, as his biographer tells it, repeating his own words, the flooding of the sky with morning light moved him so mightily that he sat motionless on his saddle, regardless of time—it may have been minutes, it may have been hours. Like all great men, he had sympathy with Nature, and his own spiritual moods were influenced by it. He said he felt as if his heart was filled with such a realisation of the love of God in Jesus Christ as he had never enjoyed before. To Beecher this was a time of new consecration. Alone, as it were, under God's heaven, with the light thereof flooding not only his vision but his heart, he vowed himself again to the service of his Saviour. Is there so very much difference between the vow that Joshua made upon Gibeon and that which Beecher made upon his Western prairie? I trow that in essence they are one and the same.

There is another character of the same kind, whose story I have been reading but lately. If

there is one living man for whom I have reverence, a reverence that I share with you, it is Dr. J. G. Paton, the veteran missionary to the New Hebrides. This old warrior, for such is he, ventured into a wholly savage community, undefended and alone, to carry with him the glad tidings of great joy. His mood appears to have been that of Joshua, the great captain, and like him he had his votive prayer. In the midst of his warfare it seemed for the time being as if a territory he had conquered for Christ was to be lost to him, just as Joshua lost his Gibeon; and he says:—

“In discouragement, almost in despair, one night, after long praying, I fell into a deep sleep in my cabin, and God granted me a heavenly dream, or vision, which greatly comforted me, explain it how you will. Sweetest music, praising God, arrested me, and came nearer and nearer. I gazed towards it approaching, and seemed to behold hosts of shining beings bursting into view. The brilliancy came pouring all from one centre, and that was ablaze with insufferable brightness. Blinded with excess of light, my eyes seemed yet to behold in fair outline the form of the glorified Jesus, but as I lifted them to gaze on his face the joy deepened into pain; my hand rose instinctively to shade my eyes. I cried out with ecstasy. The music passed farther and farther away, and I started up, hearing a voice saying in marvellous

power and sweetness, 'Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain. At this some will only smile, but to me it was a great and abiding consolation, and I kept repeating to myself, 'He is Lord, and they are all ministering spirits. If He cheers me thus in His own work, I take courage, I know I shall succeed.' "

These two men—Henry Ward Beecher and J. G. Paton—are of kin to Joshua. There are some of them in every century. These men are all of the same stamp and mould. Who shall say that the poet-spirit is absent from any of these expressions of experience? The grandeur that Paton saw in his vision was the splendour that Beecher saw in the morning light the splendour that Joshua saw upon Gibeon. And the votive prayer, too, was one and the same. "Sun of righteousness, Lord of hosts, glorify Thyself in me."

Possibly I am speaking to some equally great servant of God, though the world knows it not. Here, perhaps, before me is one who is to be God's Moses, Joshua, Beecher, Paton. But, more probably, I am addressing a multitude whose lot is cast in the day of small things. There are many who know little but monotony; uninspiring events succeed each other, day after day, year after year. Narrow is your range, limited your outlook. You listen with a certain sympathy to the enthralling

story of great doings by a great man. But you do not feel these things have necessarily anything to do with you. Now, believe me, I know the secret that will save your life from sordidness and vulgarity, and transform it into a thing of beauty, touch it to finer issues, and lead it at last to highest glory. Do you know what it is? It is that you might fill your souls with the Divine ideal, never suffer your eyes to forget the vision; it is that you might be of the mould, the spiritual type, and the moral character, of this man of the Old Testament; it is that you might give yourself to something greater and nobler than the thought of your own worldly interest; it is that your life might be filled with God. Sometimes, as I walk along the streets, I engage in a curious exercise, which may make you smile when I tell you of it. I see a commonplace man, perhaps in frock coat and silk hat, and remember that that man is probably a descendant of the sea kings, and I wonder how he would look in a winged helmet, and an untrimmed moustache, like one of those heroes of old, who, descending upon these coasts, burned and slew in those terrible days. Remember, these passers-by are of the very same blood. In Devonshire, during my holiday, I saw labouring men toiling in the fields, and remembered these were the descendants of those who followed Drake and Frobisher, but they did not look like buccaneers. Some of these

men I meet in my daily walks have the stamp of vulgarity in their faces. You know what I mean by that. I do not mean that they forget the conventionalities now and then; I mean that they are small of soul, that they are shrivelled in their moral instincts; they have no grandeur of outlook, no magnificence of spiritual conception, no touch with God. What different men from the old Vikings, from the Elizabethan buccaneers! Savage and terrible as were those men, you could not call them vulgar. A savage is not necessarily vulgar. Something seems to be needed to fire and thrill the commonplace lives and make them greater and diviner than they are. But remember that it is not the task, it is the man that matters. I could fancy Joshua behind the counter where you have to serve; I could imagine this old captain of Israel dealing with the commonplace things in the midst of which you make your living, and they would not shrivel him; the same spirit, the same magnificent consecration would be there, too. The man who could say about this little corner of the world what this poet-captain said in Gibeon would be great wherever he was—he would still be Jehovah's man. And to you it is possible, if you will only learn that it is not the magnitude of the task but the way he discharges it that marks a man of God. Joshua prayed his prayer about a little district that hardly one of you could find to-day. What did

Gibeon matter on the map of the world? Who knows where the valley of Ajalon lies? Tiny territories these, but to Joshua they meant that a great issue had to be decided, that the tide of battle was going for or against his God—for or against his sense of what was true and right. So the victory had to be won, and he was ready; hence his prayer: "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon," and that squalid territory has been made glorious for all time because the prayer was prayed. Most of us can see at one time or another what needs to be done to make our world better than it is; we can put our finger upon what is wrong: how few of us care to take much trouble to put it right! "Many there be that say, 'Who will show us any good?' Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us." We have a nobler warfare than Joshua ever saw. May we wage ours as well as he did his! It is to realise the Kingdom of Christ in the hearts of men. And God needs men of Joshua's stature for that conflict to-day. Rise, then, young men and old, who have heard the voice of God speaking in your own hearts or seen His vision in splendour in one moment of exaltation. Never let your light go down from the point where He has placed you to witness Him. "The path of the just is as the light of the dawn which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

OUR FATHER'S BUSINESS.

"He said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"—*Luke ii. 49.*

XIII.

OUR FATHER'S BUSINESS.

THE incident recorded in this text and its context has been variously interpreted and commented upon. With the more familiar of these interpretations and comments you are doubtless acquainted. Such mediæval writers as St. Bonaventura, for example, have explained it somewhat in this wise: Here is a supernatural Being, apparently a child, standing in the midst of the doctors of the Temple, and by his wonderful, divine — indeed, supernatural — knowledge discomfits them. The reputed parents of the little one come to seek him, but he, in anticipation of that later day when he said to his mother, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” reminds them that his converse is in heaven, not on earth; that he is dealing with the things of his heavenly Father, and has neither time nor mind to think about those of his earthly father. So, in reply to their remonstrance, “Son, why hast thou so dealt with us? Thy father and I have sought

thee sorrowing," he seems to say, "Thy son? I know no father, no mother, on earth, but I must be about my heavenly Father's business." The explanation partakes of the thaumaturgical from first to last; it is certainly interesting, it contains a great deal of truth, but I do not think it is the explanation in which your minds and mine will be able to rest. There is another and far different explanation, which I like very much less, yet even it contains a truth. It runs thus: There was nothing very wonderful in the reply which Jesus made to the interrogatory or the remonstrance of his mother. He had been about his earthly father's business; probably they had left him in charge of it; and, feeling that he was doing right, seeking their will, consulting their interest, he was justified in his reply, which was a remonstrance, "Why are you surprised? I have been doing what you asked me to do; I have been looking after this earthly father's business, and if for the moment you find me in the Temple, what of that?"

There is a third and far more probable explanation, which, though it excludes some part of both of these, includes what is worthiest in them. It is this: It was the custom for the children of Jewish parents to be brought up to Jerusalem at certain feasts that they might be introduced to the Temple worship. The feast of the Passover, for example,

might be regarded, from the child's point of view, as analogous to the ceremony of confirmation in the Church of England. When the child was brought into the precincts of the Temple he was necessarily brought under the tutelage of the doctors. He was to be a catechumen; they were to ask him questions, he was to give his replies; they were to provide him with instruction in the history of his country and the religion of ancient Israel. So Jesus, at the feast of the Passover, and just as he was entering upon adolescence, was brought up that this great change might pass upon his experience, that he might be taught by those who were able to teach, and that he might enter into the ranks of those who were fitted to join in the Temple worship. It is not surprising that Jesus, being Jesus, should have astonished these doctors by his wisdom, by his answers; but, remember, it was a childish consciousness that displayed the wisdom and gave the answers; and we are not told that the doctors sought him in Nazareth and endeavoured to discover more concerning this youthful prodigy. But, seeing that Jesus had been placed in the Temple by Joseph and Mary themselves, and that they had forgotten and started on their homeward way without him, he was entitled to make the mild remonstrance he did. When he replied to his mother's question he said, in effect, "Why are you surprised? How is it

that you sought me? You placed me in the Temple; in the Temple I stayed. You have been teaching me all about a heavenly Father; I have been learning from your lips for twelve years about my God. You have brought me to the Temple, to the very centre of Israel's worship. I am learning still. Wist ye not that I must be about the things of my Father?"

This, I feel, is the true explanation of this incident. The childish consciousness of Jesus was filled with God; His parents—that is, if we allow for the moment to pass the suggestion that all men thought His parents were Joseph and Mary—had placed Him in the Temple, in the Temple He stayed, learning all He could about the God to whom these very parents had introduced Him. Now, as He goes forth from the Temple to return to Nazareth and be subject unto them, He is richer and larger in experience than He was before. "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

Doubtless some will feel a certain prejudice, if I do not remove it, against too fine an analogy being drawn between the consciousness of Jesus and their own. There is hardly a man but who, in kind if not in degree, possessed the consciousness of God in childhood which Jesus exhibits here. Many men who have lost their sense of God had it when they said, "Our Father," at

their mother's knee. What I want you to understand before we go any further is that this sweet consciousness of the presence of God which Jesus possessed in its fulness, you had also in kind before you came out into the busy world to take your place in life, and to maintain your footing there. In quality, it may be, yours was not the pure unclouded spiritual consciousness of Jesus, but I do not want you to put Him on one side and all humanity on another, and effect a separation in experience and character between the two; rather let us bring the two together, and say that the God who seemed so real to you in your childhood, of whom you learned from praying parents, was just the same God, and you had the same consciousness of Him up to a point, as Jesus Christ Himself. The simplicity of childhood in regard to the things of God often shames us now.

There rises to my mind as I speak one sweet little incident of a fortnight ago which did me great good. It was during a time when I was passing through a not very serious controversy, but which had found its way into the papers, and into the home of a certain clergyman of the Church of England. The father and mother were speaking of this incident over the breakfast-table. Their only child, a little girl, was present; she had never seen me, she had only heard my name from her father and mother, who are my friends. Presently,

in her childish treble, she asked whether Mr. Campbell were in trouble. They said "Yes." "What is it?" "Oh, they are saying he is a bad man." "Is he a bad man?" she said. Her father very stoutly and courageously answered that he was not; whereupon the little mortal slipped down from the table and went away. They did not seek her or follow her. Presently she returned, and climbing back into her chair at the breakfast-table, said, "It is all right." "What is all right, my dear?" "About Mr. Campbell. I have told God about it. So that's settled." I think I can presume far enough on the tenderheartedness of fathers and mothers to say that when the letter of the parent of that child reached me, telling me of the incident, somehow I did feel as if it were all right. "Their angels do always behold the face of My Father." Some people are able to retain that sweet unclouded consciousness of God all their lives. Some of us lose it, if only for a time.

More than once I have referred from this pulpit not only to the work, but to the character of C. H. Spurgeon. One ingredient in the character of that great preacher undoubtedly was his child-likeness of spirit. His consciousness of God was very much like that of the sweet little one of whom I have just told you, and both resemble that of the Jesus who stood in the Temple. It is said that to

his last day Mr. Spurgeon was in the habit of speaking to God as simply about the things of his daily life as though he were a little child standing at his mother's knee. At the close of his financial year he would present to God his account of his Father's business. If his helpers and church officers told him that ends could not be made to meet, Mr. Spurgeon asked them to be perfectly certain of their facts; the columns were to be added up again, the balance was to be struck, and if it was on the wrong side, down knelt the great servant of God, big child that he was, and talked about it to his heavenly Father in this way: "Our Father, this is not our business; this is Thy business; these are the accounts of God; this is the record of the work of God; we leave the adverse balance to the wisdom of God." He never was put to shame; the child-like quality, the unselfish devotion, the brave consecration of C. H. Spurgeon did the work. God honoured it; it is going on to-day. But Spurgeon was not a child. If I were to endeavour to draw an exact parallel between Jesus in the Temple and C. H. Spurgeon in the Metropolitan Tabernacle pulpit I should lead you wrong. There was no such exact parallel, because the time came when Jesus, like His great servant, ceased to be a child. He visited Jerusalem again, and stood before the doctors; but this time He saw with larger, other eyes; the Jesus who, as a

child twelve years old, had listened to them and asked them questions came back the divinely inspired Prophet of God and Saviour of men. This time he saw clear through their practices, character, conduct; He did not need to ask them any questions; He had been taught from above; and so the scourge of small cords was plaited, the money-changers were driven out, and Jesus took the place of the doctors, the zeal of the House of His Father having eaten Him up. He needed not to justify His conduct; they shrank from before Him, these miserable bargain hunters and creatures of the time. Jesus had taken the place of the doctors now—a child no more, though child-like in spirit ever, child-like even now upon the throne of the universe. It is the same Jesus that said, “I must be about My Father’s business,” who declared, “Make not My Father’s an house of merchandise.”

This incident shows Jesus’ attitude to life. Listen to these three “nots.” It was not a determination to be a good man and to live a straight life; it was something so much bigger than that that I can almost see you smile as I try to put the words into the mouth of Jesus and see how they will fit. Imagine Jesus standing before the doctors a second time, saying, “I have determined to be a good man, and to go straight in My dealings with men.” It would not seem enough, would it?

He had to be about His Father's business and forget Himself in doing it. Somehow Jesus is too great for that particular circle that we have drawn. Take another. Fancy Jesus coming to the doctors and saying, "I want to enter My protest against your way of behaving in the Temple, and, if necessary, I am prepared to die as a martyr for My opinions." The *rôle* of martyr does not fit Christ somehow, and the pose of martyr never was His. He just went about His Father's business. Thirdly, imagine Jesus saying, "But I have no concern with these things earthly, they are too trivial; I must be sure that my soul is right with God." He never said that; He never felt it; He took it for granted. Imagine Jesus troubled about His soul! Now try to range yourselves alongside of Christ and enter into His spirit. Here are some men who have been trying to live a straight life; it may be that their spiritual ambition has never risen any higher, and it is not unworthy; you want to be a good man and live a straight life. What a simple prayer! and, considering everything, one that is worthy to be answered, and shall be answered. But, secondly, imagine some of you saying to yourselves, "I am prepared to be a martyr, if necessary, in my business house, or in the midst of the public that I serve—a martyr for God, and right, and truth." Be careful; do not lay too much stress on the

martyr, or you will be alongside of Ignatius and the lions, rather than with the Christ, who never talked about Calvary till Calvary was inevitable. The post of the martyr is not the highest, after all. Lastly, there are some whose chief quest is that their souls may be right with God. Your prayer is not unworthy, but be sure that you are right in the satisfaction that you crave. Getting your soul right with God may be a matter of mere sentimental satisfaction, and no more; whereas I think there is a higher height to which you may attain, another and a more glorious reach for your spiritual consciousness; and you must attain it. The consciousness of Christ in relation to God and to life ought to be yours.

To make clear why I am saying this, listen to this postcard. The writer, whom I do not know, is one of the hearers at our midday service, and this is his dictum concerning last Thursday. You will see he is a man for whom I and many of my brethren are bound to have considerable sympathy:—

“I was one of your hearers this morning at the City Temple, and was one of those you described as longing to find God. For ten years this longing has been upon me, and I have done what you said we ought to do in order to find Him. I have walked humbly before Him, but He has not revealed Himself to me as I expected. You said

some of us must not expect to realise Him, it may be, in this life, and yet His Word says, 'Seek, and ye shall find.' You certainly enlarged my sore, but you did not tell me what to do to find God. Is there no balm? Perhaps you may tell us next Thursday."

There is a plea, a great demand addressed to heaven. May I, in all sympathy, ask my brother whether he is quite clear as to what he wants? You are speaking of a something which you may never get, and also of a something which you already have. It would be impossible for you to have written that letter if you had not already found God; the mere fact that you miss Him shows that you possess Him. If there were not a great capacity in your soul for the Father, if the Father's throne were not there, you would not lament at what you suppose is His absence from you. But, look, my brother, you must ascend with Christ, not through the doorway of sentiment, into His consciousness of God, which yet was sometimes sorrowful and in one black moment a sense of separation. You must not speak as though all life were summed up in this sentence—"To enjoy God." It is not so. But having righteousness, truth, and love, you have God. The Jesus who went into the Temple amongst the money-changers went in as a brave man should and fought a battle for God, and fought it single-handed; and

the Jesus who fearlessly attacked the prejudices of His time and the false religion in which so many of His people were being trained, the Jesus who flung the mantle of His compassion over the fallen and the weak, did so oftentimes when His own heart was burdened and heavy. What was his consciousness of God? A consciousness that, behind all, after all, there must be the mighty hand and the tender heart of the All-Father. He lived His daily life in that belief, unquestioning. It was not a matter of sentiment with Him, it was a matter of consecrated life. So must it be with you. It is related of the late Dr. Dale that at one time in his history, when he was doing his best for his country and had scarcely an hour of leisure for himself, a Roman Catholic divine said to him, "Dale, when are you going to quit politics and look after your soul?" Dr. Dale's answer was something to this effect: "I am doing what I am convinced God wants me to do, and I will leave my soul to take care of itself, or rather that God may take care of it for me."

Now, my good brother, believe this: God may to-morrow throw open the doors of His consolation to you, He may to-day pour His Holy Spirit's testimony into your heart; you may just be as sure of God this night perhaps as you are of your own being. But, on the other hand, He may be telling you to go out into the open and live out

everything you have ever seen of God, and live it as Christ lived it, serve it as Christ served it; then there will come to your heart the inevitable "Well done!" that comes to every noble man, "Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord." It is as certain as day follows night that the man who in the name of the highest he has ever seen lives his life and serves his generation must find that satisfaction in his soul. God speaks His word of approval; never mistake the voice when you are about your Father's business. One beautiful thing I want to tell you to make this point clear. There is working to-day in England a man, of whom most of you have heard, but whom I hesitate to name, who is serving in a high position, but serving as simply and humbly as though he passed his days in a cottage; he might be obscure, so child-like is he, and so simple in his way of facing life. He is the son, too, of a great man, and this is what he tells me was an experience of his in relation to that father. He said the greatest crisis of his life, the most overwhelming sorrow he ever passed through, was when God called that father home. "But," he said, "I made him my model and my inspiration; not that I have ever reached to the height to which he towered. In one of my darkest hours, when trouble had made me ill, and I lay, as it seemed, between life and death, I dreamed that I was a

a child again, and when I woke and opened my eyes for the moment it seemed as if it could not be a dream. I remember turning to look up in my father's face, and I felt around me my father's arms. Is it too much to suppose that I dreamed what was true?" I do not answer his question here, save to give it a larger meaning. He dreamed what was true; he lost his father, as it seemed to his earthly consciousness, for the time being; but he lived in his memory, in his atmosphere, and then there came the one moment of insight when he felt as if the father was not gone, but the loving arms were around him still. If it were true of the earthly father, a thousandfold more is it true of the heavenly Father. The great vision some day is coming to you, my brother who wrote the postcard, so certain as you take the line that Jesus took about His Father's business.

In one of Charles Reade's works there is a perhaps even more beautiful figure. A little child is handed over to the keeping of another by her own father—not that he wants to part with her, but they are poor, and so he gives her into the rich man's keeping, making her the rich man's daughter so far as a resolution can do it, in order to find bread for both. But he stays about where she is; he keeps watch and ward over that little life until it is matured; and the girl, as she grows

up, begins to feel that she can always rely upon the unselfish love of him who seems but a serving man. But her father, as she supposes him to be, is cold, distant, and even cruel. The day came when he repudiated her with anger, selfish and base, because she had brought what seemed disgrace on his name. Then forward stepped the serving-man, and flung his arms around her, saying, with the fierceness of righteous indignation to the man who had evilly entreated her, "She never was your child!" Then the girl knew why it was that she had felt such rest, peace, and joy in the presence of the serving-man. She had listened to his language of love many a time, not knowing the speaker was her real father. Brethren, some of you look very strong, and very wise, and very brave, and as though you knew all about life; but I know you better; you are just as little children. Old father world out there is waiting for you, and what he did to you this morning he will do again this afternoon, and you feel sometimes as if your service of him has been repaid with cruelty and baseness. You may turn cynic under the experience. Beware! There is a better Father—the One that sent you here, the One who has made you seek the good, the One who protests within your consciousness every time you are guilty of a coward silence or an evil speech. Listen to His voice; still and small though it be,

it is the voice of the universe; and when the tongue of the world is silenced that voice will be speaking still. Go about your Father's business; be brave, be true, be strong, like the child and the man Jesus. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

CHRIST THE RESURRECTION.

“Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the Resurrection.”
—*St. John xi. 23—25.*

XIV.

CHRIST THE RESURRECTION.

WE have here an account of a resurrection with which Jesus had to do, but which preceded His own, and was, if we are to accept the Gospel records, the immediate cause of His death. If the resurrection of Jesus presents difficulties to the modern mind, how much more does the resurrection of Lazarus present difficulties? If indeed Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb after he had been in it for four days, one would have thought that the Pharisees would never have dared to lay violent hands upon the Christ. One would have supposed that He must have been surrounded by an atmosphere of awe and terror, sufficient to make them avoid the Wonder-worker. But, as we know, it was not so. Indeed, the mere fact that He came to Jerusalem and apparently called Lazarus back to life placed Him in the hands of His enemies, and they crucified Him. The only way of getting round the difficulty thus presented or of giving any even approximately satisfactory answer to it is

to say that the Pharisees did not believe that Jesus had really called Lazarus back from the dead. This accounts for the cruel taunt hurled at Him as He hung upon the cross: "He saved others, Himself He cannot save. If He be the Son of God, let Him come down from the cross and we will believe." If this man who had healed the sick and cleansed the lepers had also raised the dead surely He need not die! Again, a much more serious difficulty is presented in the fact that Lazarus never appears to have said a word as to the mystery of death through which he had passed, and upon which he might have been expected to throw some light. The first thing which we should want to know if we encountered a Lazarus to-day would be: What is on the other side of the great change? What have you to tell us? But no one appears to have asked the question or thought of it, and Lazarus either had nothing to say or declined to speak. It is my own view that he had nothing to tell. I cannot think that this story is other than literally true, and I have given my reasons for thinking so before and will not pause to re-state them now. The probability is that Lazarus had not awakened upon the other side. We shall all die to-night and rise again in the morning. What shall we be doing in the meantime? It may be that the consciousness of the dead Lazarus knew no more of the change and

mystery than we shall know between midnight and dawn. Yet there are some who would describe the story as allegory or parable, and prefer to call it so because of the difficulties **at** which I have hinted. If I address such I would say you are on common ground with the literalists after all. Regard it as parable if you please. We who believe in its historicity join hands with you who do not on the ground of the sublime and beautiful utterance which forms our text. For this, at least, has no more than an incidental reference to the physical resurrection. "Jesus saith unto her: Thy brother shall rise again. . . . I am the Resurrection."

Do you think Martha really understood what Jesus meant to convey? In part she may have done, all of it she could not until, like the rest of the tiny Christendom which existed on the morrow of the resurrection of our Saviour, she understood that the quality and not the duration of the life that she lived was in question. This utterance of Jesus, "I am the Resurrection," has had a chequered history in the nineteen centuries of its existence, and during its progress down the ages it has often been hardened and materialised until its spiritual meaning has been in danger of being obscured and destroyed.

Let me ask you to reflect upon the actual meaning of the word. "Resurrection" (*ἀνάστασις*), means

a rising upward, an issuing forth, a going forward, not a coming back. The Pharisees who stood around the tomb of Lazarus believed indeed in the physical, the coming back, resurrection, but not in the resurrection of which Jesus spoke. That had not entered into their experience. They knew of nothing that related them to it. St. Paul was brought up as a Pharisee, and in the writings of St. Paul you may see the Pharisaic notion of a physical resurrection gradually giving way to the more spiritual view, which is that of Jesus, and is contained in our text. In Acts xxiii. he appeals from Sadducee to Pharisee in these words: "Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." But later in his life Paul, the aged, seems to have transcended, almost without knowing it, all thought of a physical resurrection, when he says to his listening Church: "I long to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." "Then cometh to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory." Not much thought here of physical resurrection, but rather the apostolic thought is re-stated: "We shall not be unclothed, but clothed upon."

In Christian history the doctrine of the Resurrection has never been quite clearly held, and even at this hour, and perhaps in this church, you may

find views which destroy each other concerning it. Some would think of those who have passed hence as though they were sleeping a dreamless sleep until that mysterious morning in the consummation of the ages when the trumpet of the archangel shall sound and those that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall come forth, those that have done good to the resurrection of joy and those that have done evil to the resurrection of pain. But there are others who would speak, and this is the commoner view, as though there were no age-long, dreamless sleep, but rather that, at the chill touch of death, the soul passes hence into the mysterious unknown where an anticipatory heaven and an anticipatory hell wait for judgment; and that when the Judgment Day dawns we must appear in our natural bodies before the judgment seat of Christ, that we may receive the reward of the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad.

Need I say that both these views are utterly beside the mark? They were not in the mind of our Lord as He stood by the grave of Lazarus. The life of which our Lord is thinking is not merely day added to day, year added to year, age to age. It is the life whose quality is in question. It is either a going upward or a going downward, a resurrection or an entombment of the soul. Christ is the Resurrection, and it is ours to examine in what sense He is the Resurrection for us,

When I name the name of Christ, I mean the principle of good in the human soul—every human soul—the divine life in every man. This life divine, this principle of good, finds its focus in Jesus of Nazareth, in such a way that we may say with perfect truth, in words that are the faith of Christendom and its gospel too, Jesus *was* and *is* the Christ, and therefore *was* and *is* the Resurrection.

Consider that Jesus was the Resurrection to Martha, although she knew it not, at the very moment that He used the word. He must have stood in gentle patience, remembering as He did that this poor woman, who was sorrowing for the death of her brother, could understand no more than the Twelve that Jesus had many things to say unto her, but she could not bear them then. The home at Bethany was in a sense the creation of Jesus. What the previous history of Martha may have been we know not; the good and noble woman that she now was Jesus had something to do with. She sorrowed for her brother with the sorrow of unselfish love, and Jesus had perhaps been the refined source of it, and whether she knew it or not, the Christ Who was before the ages had meant for her the uprising of an unselfish and loving devotion. Christ was her Resurrection.

To Peter, and John, and the Magdalen, Christ was the Resurrection in this very hour when He

stood before Lazarus's tomb. Presently Peter was going to deny Him with cursing and swearing. Jesus, his Master, foretelling the sad defection, said: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou hast turned again (when the Christ within thee has risen again) strengthen thy brethren." Jesus was Peter's Resurrection.

Jesus was the Resurrection of John. The beloved disciple who had once been a son of thunder, who prayed for fire to descend from heaven and consume the enemies of his Lord, is the same who, in after days, leaves to the Christian Church the message: "Little children, love one another." "Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be; but we know that when He is made manifest, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Jesus was the Resurrection life of John.

Jesus was the Resurrection of the Magdalen, otherwise this harlot of years ago had not wiped His feet with her hair as she washed them with her tears. Never would she have stood weeping at the empty tomb for the Christ Whom she thought she had lost for ever, had it not been that that Christ had already risen within her own soul.

Jesus was the Resurrection of Paul. This zealot, this fierce-minded persecutor of the Church of God,

on his way to Damascus is stricken down. Who shall say what it was in the phenomenon which laid him low? But this we know, that the voice he heard was the voice of the Christ within his own heart: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Jesus was the Resurrection to Paul, and, Oh! what a resurrection that was! This greatest soul of early Christian history, this man of the ages, this saint of all time, was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. Christ had risen within his own soul.

And the ages through, I seek the same principle and seek it not in vain. Consider what issued from the tomb of the risen Christ upon the first Easter morning, a new principle, a beautiful thing, transforming human hearts and changing human lives into something noble and heroic and holy. It was not merely that the body of Christ came forth from the grave, but that the eternal Christ rose up in the experience of the race. And I would ask you to remember this, which doubtless some of you are thinking of as I speak: No overthrown good in the history of humanity since Christ died and rose again has perished utterly. You cannot think of a single instance of the kind. The things for which saints and martyrs have suffered and died have always been victorious in the long run. Men perish, principles endure. Take courage and confidence from this source. You never can kill the Christ in any age, in any heart, in any witness, in

any experience. Christ is the Resurrection and the Life.

This exordium leads me to ask you in what sense Christ is the Resurrection for you and for me, and to answer it thus: First, Christ is the principle of Saviourhood in all the labourers and sufferers of the world. And secondly, and not less true, in fact it is the complementary truth, Christ is the principle of potential holiness in the vilest sinner that ever breathed.

First, then, Christ is the principle of Saviourhood in all the labourers and sufferers of the world. Outside of our Church to-day in this vast London of ours, and in this illustrious England, and the wide world over, following the course of the sun, men are not only raising pæans to Christ glorified, but they are laying down their lives as Christs crucified. Can you explain how it is that to-day thousands of men, a mighty army, the real Church of God, men and women, too, are plucking others from the furnace of fire and out of darkness into light, and to do it they are laying down their own lives, gladly, readily, gloriously? What is the spirit that prompts? Not the spirit of a far-distant Christ or a Jesus that was, but an abiding, unconquerable principle of self-sacrificing love. It is the risen life within the soul.

And what is true upon the larger scale is true upon the smaller, that of the individual. I come

very close to the hearts worshipping Christ to-night in this place when I say that all the unselfish love you, my hearers, have ever shown in your domestic duty, in your lonely task, in the humdrum and the commonplace of your daily environment is evidence of the power of the risen Christ. And this is what St. Paul meant by "the power of His resurrection." The Cross is not the end but the means. No cross can crush for ever the life which is laid down in the service of unselfish love, which is the service of God. The risen Christ must issue forth and unto victory. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the consecrated service of consecrated lives.

I may address a woman whose life has been laid down for an unworthy husband; or a noble husband whose life has been consecrated to attempting the redemption of an unworthy wife. You who are spiritually strong know, it may be, the daily struggle with moral weakness in the person of someone who does not know his own danger, nor the extent of your sacrifice. Brother, sister, I would link you to that process of the ages which means eternal victory. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." The Christ never suffers in vain. Every crucifixion implies a resurrection. It were impossible to slay that for which Christ died, and which is the joy that was set before Him.

The principle of good, the divine life, is even

now within you rising to its own. Sing, then, your resurrection song to-day, for you are of those in whom Christ has risen.

Suppose some of you have lost courage, or are losing hope, which is very possible. I have one word of comfort to speak to you which none can gainsay. It is this—that behind all that you have ever attempted in Jesus' name, for Jesus' sake (which is for love and righteousness) is the hand of Omnipotence. It were impossible for this Jesus to be holden of death, and in you, again, He saith, in the voice of holy triumph: "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Then there are many of you, doubtless, of whom it may be said that life has become poorer and darker since the very object for which you once sacrificed yourself has been taken from you, as Lazarus was taken from Martha. The grim intruder comes into the dearest experiences and the holiest tasks, and obliterates the one and destroys the other! Death never pauses for the pleadings of love. If there be any here who feel as though death has robbed them of all that made life, I ask you to listen to the voice of Christ as it comes through our text: "I am the Resurrection." What you have loved and served in the dearest that God gave you and that brought the best forth from you was eternal, for it was Christ. If you have ever seen aught to reverence in man or woman, if you have

ever given yourself in adoration and loving service because of what you have seen that was God-like in a loved one, you have seen Jesus, the invincible life that no tomb can hold.

“There is no death. What seems so is transition.
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life Elysian,
Whose portals we call Death.”

And think not merely to recall the joy that has been. Nay, beloved, those who have been taught of Christ think less of the joy that has been than of that which is to be. No affinity which is sacred, no union that came by the bidding of God is ever destroyed by the hand of death, for that affinity and that union are expressions of eternal love.

“‘Lord, Thou hast conquered death, we know ;
Restore again to life,’ I said,
‘This one who died an hour ago.’
He smiled : ‘She is not dead.’

“‘Yet our beloved seem so far,
The while we yearn to feel them near,
Albeit with Thee we trust they are.’
He smiled : ‘And I am here.’

“‘Dear Lord, how shall we know that they
Still walk unseen with us and Thee,
Nor sleep, nor wander far away?’
He smiled : ‘Abide in Me.’”

Lastly, I would say to the man whose life has been lived in flagrant defiance of the highest God has shown him, to the pain-makers of the world,

to those who lure other men to evil, and to those who have consecrated their own souls to shame and wrong; listen, hard-hearted, callous, earthbound, you cannot escape the judgments of God. They are true and righteous altogether. Because they are the judgments of God they are the judgments of Christ, and these are compassionate even when they are stern. If you will not respond to the pleadings of love, God will draw you with hands of pain. Let those who have sinned against their own manhood be aware of this, that the Jesus Who summoned Lazarus from the tomb has not forgotten that wherein you have buried your Christ, the Christ that was committed to you when God breathed into you the breath of life. And, foolish one, why should you court agony and wrap your soul in flame? You are dashing yourself against Omnipotence in clinging to the life of sin. Wrong doing is always a blunder! Christ must rise again. If men knew what lies upon the other side of transgression there would be none committed. You cannot entomb your own divinity for ever. The Christ Who is speaking within your heart as well as mine knows that I speak true, for the voice that you hear without is but the echo of the voice that has been long speaking within: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And he that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die."

WHY WAS HE SCOURGED?

“Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him.”—*John xix, 1.*

XV.

WHY WAS HE SCOURGED?

ONE Sunday evening our subject was "Jesus on the Judgment Seat," and our text was taken from this chapter. In reading the chapter I emphasised the verse which is our text this morning. On the Thursday morning following a Scotsman came to me after the service, and referring to Sunday night's subject and to this particular text, asked, "Why was He scourged?" I replied, "Because Pilate was a coward; he thought to placate the multitude, and at the same time possibly to save the life of Jesus; thinking that the scourging might satisfy them, he tortured his innocent prisoner with the purpose of releasing Him." But this did not satisfy my questioner. He said, "The occasion of the scourging was as you describe it, but this was not the cause; what I mean is: If Jesus were the sinless Son of God, why was this torture inflicted? Why was it even permitted in a universe which is said to be governed by a righteous God? Was it not that in enduring

this agony He endured the punishment that was due to human sin? If not, why was He scourged?" I answer, Not because He bore the punishment due to human sin.

Many persons read the New Testament as though the Gospel of Christ implied all this; they speak as though our Saviour endured on our behalf vicarious punishment—that is, a penalty which was our due, and the enduring of which released us from bearing it. It is true that He endured, as sometimes we have to do in a lesser degree, vicarious suffering, and endured it for all humanity. But it requires to be made clear that vicarious punishment can have no existence anywhere, whereas vicarious suffering is the law of all moral life.

The mistaken notion to which I have referred is often illustrated thus. We read in Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities" of the French aristocrat under the Revolution who went to the guillotine to save a friend by personating him; or we read of the Royalist servant, under the English Commonwealth, who, attired as his master, suffered execution to save that master's life; or in song and story we dwell upon the records of those Highlanders who, in the hope of screening Bonnie Prince Charlie, suffered themselves to be taken, and not only averred themselves to be he, but allowed themselves to be shot, in the hope of

saving him. These illustrations have always in sermons and in treatises the glory and the majesty of the sacrifice that was undergone by the heroes in question. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend." There is something noble in every such case; something was undergone by the victim that was not his own desert. But do you not realise that in every such case justice, or certainly government, was cheated; no real substitution took place? Had it been told to Robespierre and his gang that an aristocrat had taken the place of another aristocrat it would not have saved the life of the man whom it was sought to screen. Had Cromwell known that a Royalist servant had taken the place of his master he might have honoured the magnificent sacrifice of the servant, called him back to life—had it been in his power—or saved him from death if there were time to do it; but he would not have spared the master—the first death would not have compensated for the second. Lastly, the English Government would not have withdrawn the price that they had set upon Bonnie Prince Charlie's head because this or that Highlander died in his place. Justice in every case was cheated, or it was sought that justice should be deceived. But God cannot be cheated, and God is never deceived. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

Vicarious punishment will avail for him no whit at all.

There are three considerations I would like you to note before we go further. First, if it were true—as it is not true, and the New Testament nowhere says it is true—that Christ endured the punishment that is due to human sin, then God Himself would be unjust. It is not just to punish any sinless victim in the stead of another. Moreover, secondly, such punishment, even if it were just, ought to be an equivalent for the punishment that would have been inflicted in the other case. Did the passion of our Lord take the place of the punishment that has descended upon sin since humanity began? The three hours' agony upon the Cross, mysterious as it was, and one cannot speak of it without the utmost reverence, is never represented in the New Testament as an equivalent for anything; moreover, that which is temporal is no equivalent to that which is eternal. Finally, I ask you to remember, that whatever may be the truth about the justice of God or the infliction of vicarious punishment, the penal consequences of sin *are* endured in this life, not always, but very commonly; perhaps oftener than we realise, and sufficiently often to lead us to the conclusion that the universe is organised for the vindication of righteousness. Even penitence does not do away with all the consequences of a man's wrong-doing. As I speak,

I think of a man who lies in prison far from here, and who but a short time ago occupied a high and honourable position in the world. Like many others, he misappropriated money that did not belong to him, with the full intention of making restitution before the world knew. Call it by what name he might, it was felony, and for felony he had to go to prison, and his family is ruined. Presently the newspapers will say his sentence has expired, his punishment is over, he is a free man. Everyone of us knows perfectly well that his punishment is not over, and will not be over while he lives; the bar sinister is placed across that man's whole career. He is a man of some fineness of feeling, religious training, moral instinct; he will suffer not only in his own disgrace, but in what he has brought upon his dear ones, and he must suffer until the end of his life. If that suffering is to be regarded as a mark of the implacability of God, the only word to describe it is unrelenting. In my view, however, these penal consequences of his guilt are not a mark of vindictiveness nor of vengeance, but rather of the mercy of God. The point I wish immediately to make is: That no vicarious punishment of anyone else has availed, or can avail, to screen that man from what he is undergoing.

These three things, then, amongst others, lead me to say the Gospel of Christ nowhere speaks

about vicarious punishment, or of penalty remitted because someone else undergoes something; but it does speak of a magnificent truth, the full meaning of which you will never exhaust until you stand where pain and sin are no more. Christ was not crucified, Christ was not scourged, Christ suffered nothing, because you are to get off what you rightly deserve; and what applies to you applies to all humankind. His suffering for you and for me is that which has drawn us to His Cross to-day, and makes us bow low at His feet and acclaim Him our Sovereign and our Lord. I will tell you why He was scourged. It was because He deliberately chose to identify Himself with humanity. In its joy and sorrow, its heights and depths, its peace and pain, Jesus laid Himself alongside human experience, sin-stained and grief-stricken as it is. If there is one thing that is unmistakably written on almost every page of the New Testament, it is, that in the consciousness of Jesus His life was a voluntary offering (never revoked) for the sake of humanity. He came to redeem, He came to break sin's spell, and He seems to have been conscious all the time His mighty work was going forward that it was His own wish, His own choice. He had surrendered the glory He had with His Father, and entered into the human lot. Mr. H. G. Wells has written many interesting books, but none, in my judg-

ment, quite so interesting or so helpful, as "The Wonderful Visit." An angel blunders into this world from some other dominion in which there is no sin and no sorrow. The able novelist goes on to depict his experience: how no one will believe, except the man who has happened to shoot him as a strange bird, that a being from another world, purer and nobler and gladder than this, has arrived in ours. He tells of the surprise, the bewilderment of this poor celestial being at what he meets and has to suffer at human hands and in human conduct. In the end he departs without having done very much good, but having suffered a great deal. Whether Mr. Wells thought of it or no, I cannot say, but here is a picture, up to a point, of exactly what the New Testament declares Jesus was and did, but with this essential difference: while the angel appears to have been taken unawares, and is utterly at sea, and fails to understand this poor world into which he has entered, and goes out again utterly beaten and broken by human depravity, Christ is represented in the New Testament as coming into it, a sinless Being, knowing what heaven means, and what this world would mean if there were no sin in it. He deliberately pits His sinless character against this sinful world, and conquers. True, it tortured Him, and it slew Him, but He was the Victor in His death. There was one thing which sin never

could make Him do, it could not make Him sin.

This is why He was scourged, but the scourging was a mark of His victory. He need not have been scourged if He had taken another way, and became the victim of sin instead of its Master.

One thing more. In a certain sense Christ is humanity. I trust I do not speak too mystically when I say humanity is a unit. We have a common consciousness, if we could get down to it, and it is undoubted that, for good or for evil, we are bound together by invisible but infrangible bonds. Christ felt this, asserted it; we belong to Him, and He to us. He came to His own, and His own received Him not. The identification between His experience and ours could not have been closer, but it meant suffering for the sinless Son of God, and all the more so because He saw further than any child of time has ever been able to see. Consider the world into which Christ came. The poor, jaded Roman world had lost its illusions. A recent writer has told us that, to all appearance, at that time ideals had been buried for ever, all thinkers turned cynical, humanity had ceased to believe in itself, and it looked as if there were nothing in it, no element of promise or potency that could lift it again and give it a fresh start upon the pathway of righteousness and truth. Then Christ came, bringing a new breath from the heights, a new light from heaven.

For the first Christians astonished their contemporaries by the exuberance of their joy and the grandeur of their unselfishness; there was a new creation. Why? Because a sinless life had been lived—just one—and whatever it was that enabled that sinless life to be lived, *that* the first Christians claimed for themselves and lived too. The same Gospel is living now. It cost Christ, as you see, misunderstanding, travail of soul, His Gethsemane, His scourging in Pilate's hall, and His death upon Calvary. It was inevitable, it had to be so; but the power, whatever it was, that gained Him His victory, *that* became available immediately for the penitents in the world. Christianity was born and is conquering because of that victory of Christ. John Stuart Mill has somewhere said there is no guarantee that good will ultimately conquer evil anywhere. Why do we assume that it will? It is easy to answer that question now. Why is good to conquer evil? Why is any good man or any ordinary man who meditates a heroic deed certain that he is on the winning side in the long run? It is because a sinless life was lived, because the Christ could not be crushed, because whatever made Christ a conqueror over the world's sin is available in making you victor over yours. If humanity is one, and Christ is the Soul of it, we have in the scourging of the Master only the price that was paid for a victory that lasts for all time.

Three illustrations will make my meaning clearer. Some time ago I watched with sympathetic interest the sorrow of a household in which were two sisters devoted to one another. One of them was dying of a painful disease, and the other one said to me, "It is terrible to look on and feel helpless." We know what she meant. Hardly a man or a woman but has felt like that. "Oh!" she added, "if I could but have the disease too; if I could but let her know that I am suffering the same pain, it would be some satisfaction to me." It would have been none to the poor invalid, but we know what was meant by the watching sister; it was the solicitude of sympathy—if she could just share in the ill it would have been something as an expression of her love. There is one illustration of the mind of Christ, the desire of the Redeemer. Sorrow has passed upon all men; man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. The problem of grief is only one side of the problem of sin. Whatever their relation may be, we never can consider apart the question of pain and the question of wrong. Jesus, in His unswerving, undeviating attitude of love, took the position assumed by the sorrowing sister: He would enter in, He would search the depths of human experience, He could not save from without. There is nothing mechanical about moral deliverance; He had to come within, share and

share between God and man. This is the atonement, or, as I prefer to call it, the at-rightment of the sin of the world.

Again, I have somewhere read of a French veteran in the Franco-German War, whose first service for his country had been as a boy in the army of the great Napoleon. In the evening of his days he went out to fight his country's battles once more, for even the old men were called out when the Germans invested Paris. This brave old soldier had one grandchild, a boy who was to him as his own life—nay, dearer. The little fellow had got into bad companionship somehow, and was induced, in an hour of frolic, to steal through to the German lines, and there he and his guilty comrades sold the secret of French weakness at a certain spot in the defences of the doomed city. When he came home again, conscience smote him in the middle of the night. He stole to his grandfather, and, putting the money by the bedside, told his story, made his confession, sobbed out his anguish. The old man said nothing, but, rising from his couch and putting on his accoutrements, he sallied forth into the night to give the alarm, to defend the spot that was to be assaulted. But that was not all, that was perfectly obvious; he felt that something was due to France. One who was as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh and soul of his soul had sinned a sin and wrought a

shame, so he never came back. When the victorious French troops had repelled the foe, he marched on alone against the whole German army and died. Here is another figure illustrative of our Master's work and our Saviour's purpose. No figure is adequate to the facts; one can but illustrate. "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself." The Christ marched against all the ill that had ever beset humanity, because humanity belonged to Him; He identified Himself, as it were, with its shame and bore its burden, for the sin, which always causes agony some time and somewhere, descended upon Him with pitiless force at Gethsemane and at Calvary. He did not turn back; it was impossible; His love was too great and too divine for that. Forward He went, and through the conflict, but in so doing conquered for us all. The difference between Jesus and humanity is this—that where we have suffered and failed, He suffered and succeeded. In His death, the death of the Sinless, we have the Just dying because of the unjust, and His victory is our hope.

Lastly, suppose I address one into whose family, into whose life, there has come one black sorrow because of the conduct of one member of that household. That boy of yours has caused anguish, disgrace, and scandal to attach themselves to an honoured name. Your friends never dream of

supposing that you are guilty; the lad's father can lift up his head now, if he would, as much as he did before, as proudly and as bravely; men do not think of him as a thief or a scoundrel; they have only a word of pity for him. By-and-bye your lad's failure and sin will have been forgotten, or, if referred to, it will only be spoken of with bated breath—a moment's allusion, and then the subject is past. But you—shall I say his mother?—you will never forget; every day and every hour of the day you will be thinking of that culprit who is trying to fight his way back to honesty and truth, perhaps in a foreign land, and your prayers daily ascend for him. You suffered as much as he suffered; when he fell you might almost be said to have stood in the dock with him and gone to the prison cell. He could not have endured more than you endured, because, in a sense, you were he, and so must ever remain. Now, as he struggles back to manhood, are not you struggling too? Is not his pain your pain? will not his victory be your victory? and would not you stand for him to-morrow against the whole world if you were called upon to do it and it would do any good? His life is as your life, your life is as his life; in a sense, his sin is your sin, and yet you did not sin it. You were with him all the way, yet there are some things you cannot do for him. Is there anybody that can? I turn back to the New Testa-

ment where that mystery of vicarious suffering reaches its highest, at the Cross of Calvary, and I read my answer there. Why was He scourged? Because He felt as you do, because Jesus could not leave humanity to its fate, because our failure is, in a sense, His failure; our sin, though it never was His sin, He regards as His sin. He takes our burden; our defeat He comes to turn into victory. This Christ has not quitted His work. This morning, as I speak to you, He is thinking of us, praying for us, planning for us, and

“Every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are his alone.”

All true repentance is a claim upon His holiness and the fruit of His victory. It is true to say, and in no narrow and inconsequent sense, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.”

THE CALL OF SAMUEL.

"Here am I; for thou didst call me."—1 *Sam. iii. 6.*

XVI.

THE CALL OF SAMUEL.

THE narrative which is contained in this third chapter of the First Book of Samuel is one which for the mind of to-day contains not a few difficulties. And yet we have no right to ignore or pass them over or attempt to explain them away : here they are, and the story as it stands we ought to be able to build into our experience. Some time ago one of your number told me of a remark of one of his fellows in this Thursday morning congregation, to this effect : “ When Mr. Campbell takes hold of one of these Old Testament stories, we know perfectly well that he is going to make it somewhat different from anything that we have ever heard of it before.” I imagine the speaker thought that my exposition would be directed to explain the narrative away rather than to throw light upon it as it stands. Now I venture to observe that this morning and every morning when we have to deal with Old Testament narrative my method is quite the opposite. We never have to

explain away when we take one of these venerable stories as our inspiration, and as throwing light upon our everyday experience; but we have to assimilate it to what we ourselves are living day by day and hour by hour. It seems to be the bias of some people who come to Old Testament story to attempt to show how utterly unlike it is to anything that we have ever lived ourselves; and you may be quite certain that that is the wrong method to adopt. For, believe me, everyone of these stories stands in some relation to your life and to mine, and God is quite as near to your life and mine as He was to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, or any of the Old Testament prophets. And, what is more, the thing which is true of their lives, and marks especially the intervention of God in their case, is equally true in your life and in the Divine guidance thereof. So when we come to this Old Testament story this morning, we shall attempt to discover in it what has immediate, everyday value, and see wherein it anticipates your experience and mine.

Well, then, as the story stands, or as we have been conventionally taught to regard it, what are the facts? I remember a picture in my childhood that impressed me at the time, and I suppose the men present before me this morning, who are of my age or even older, will remember similar illustrations. This picture I spent many an hour looking at, and asking questions about it. Samuel was

represented as kneeling beside his little bed (and it was unmistakably a nineteenth century baby's crib), and saying his evening prayer, when, coming from nowhere in particular, a voice seemed to have arrested his startled attention. Then in the story beneath was told in a few words what was a paraphrase of the Old Testament narrative—how he goes to his Master, Eli, and tells him of the mysterious voice; how he is bidden by the priest to return to his couch; how again the wondering boy is addressed by the supernatural voice; how on the third occasion Eli perceived that God had been speaking to the little one, and bids him reply, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth"; then how Samuel is used as the vehicle of a minatory message to Eli himself; and how this represented the beginning, as it were, of Samuel's personal relation to God. Do you think I have stated fairly accurately, from what I remember of my childhood's picture, your childhood's notions of what is recorded in this chapter? Let us think if our manhood's knowledge is in every particular like it, or in any small degree different.

This first book of Samuel is, like nearly every other book of the Old Testament, a compilation. It is not one simple narrative written down by one single pen; there are a number of books represented here, and the chapter before us is by no means the oldest of them; rather it is one of the

very latest. The oldest part of the Book of Samuel is that which describes the prophet's meeting with him who was to be King Saul. This narrative of Samuel's childhood post-dates it by centuries, and yet, to say so does not necessarily stamp it as untrue: quite the reverse, in my judgment. I think that the later writer **who** has given us this third chapter, this story of Samuel's vocation, wrote down for us what was the floating tradition of centuries, grouped around and associated with the name of the Israelitish prophet. But, as you are well aware, from the history of our own literature, the moment you write down what has been a tradition in people's memories that moment you tend to harden and rigidify the narrative, and to treat its accidents as though they were essentials. So in all probability we have here an unimaginative scribe writing down, detail by detail, as if it were an event recorded in to-day's newspaper, something which is really centuries old. If we get into the psychology of what that event really was, you may find that the details as they are given here require to be interpreted in the light of twentieth century experience.

Now what shall I say the psychology of the narrative really is? Here is an aged priest in an imperfectly unified Israel, an Israel whose history was not so dissimilar from that of our own country but that we can understand how this keeper of the

sanctuary at Shiloh was at once priest and judge of a people struggling into national consciousness. But in his old age weakness of character shows itself. His sons do not walk in the way of their father; they have brought shame and discredit upon the worship of Jehovah. Either through indifference or through weakness, probably the latter, Eli has not been so stern with them as he should. All Israel knows of their behaviour; and one unnamed prophet, we are told here in the second chapter, comes to Eli and tells him that the judgments of God will overtake his house unless this scandal of the sanctuary is done away. Eli does nothing, he continues in his office; and his sons are by this time preparing to lead the hosts of Israel in the field. But what kind of an Israel is it that they are leading? Is it an Israel full of moral passion, such as Israel ought to have been, the chosen people of God? By no means: the whispering of the corrupted soldiers would be concerning the incapability of their corrupter leaders. How could Eli pray for a blessing upon the arms of his sons and their followers, who were supposed to be fighting the battle of an austere righteousness, but which they had already betrayed?

And yet there must have been earnest spirits in Israel then as there have been earnest spirits in every age; and one of these, I venture to believe, was growing up by the side of Eli himself. Samuel

was not a child at this time; the word which is here rendered "child" might be far better rendered "youth." This lad, on the borders of manhood, with a deeply religious nature, pure and unsullied, looked with eyes of deep concern upon the state of his native land, and still more upon the shame and the scandal attaching to the worship of Jehovah in his beloved sanctuary. He was very much, I should suppose, in nature like the young St. Bernard, who led a monastic movement in the twelfth century, for although a prophet of the Old Testament, he has his parallels in Christendom. Of the many religious natures in the history of the world, consecrated in youth, undoubtedly Samuel's was one. He saw visions and dreamed dreams—shall I say, like Evan Roberts of the present day? This young man looked, I say, with the deepest concern and sorrow upon the state of religion in his country. He did not dare to speak to Eli concerning it, but he knew of the prophet who had already warned his aged friend, and he knew of the mutterings of Israel outside the sanctuary door, and he must have prayed much and often over the problem they presented.

Now imagine this susceptible youth on his bed at night, after his mind had been filled during the day, and many days, with these thoughts, starting from his sleep, imagining that someone had called him by name. Have you never had a similar feel-

ing in times of stress? I think I have. At once he hastens to the side of the man of whom his thoughts had been full, for he loved Eli, and Eli had been kind to him. That which had been a thought in his mind had now become as it were a word in his ear: "Here am I; for thou calledst me." Imagine the natural reply of the older prophet and priest: "I called not; lie down again." Three times the experience is repeated; the third time both Eli and Samuel had been impressed with the feeling that the younger had been addressed by God himself. And so he had, whether there was an audible voice or not. What I want you to see is that Samuel's action had been prepared for, as all exalted moral action is, by his intense absorption in the doings of his time. This call is no summons to one who has never before had a thought about right and wrong, but to one whose heart is grieving and in whose soul a purpose is forming. Wide awake now, the lad kneels before God, bringing to a point a resolution he had been pondering as the days were going by and the scandal was increasing: "Shall I speak, I, the youngest of them all? Is this what God is bidding me do? Is it the will of Jehovah that I should speak as His prophet, and say what is coming to Israel, that which the better heart of Israel already feels concerning the wickedness that is being wrought within the very threshold of this sacred house?"

And when the morning comes the battle is over, the question is settled; the youth draws near to his elder, and, encouraged by his interrogation, tells him every whit. It is as though he would say to him, "I have prayed long over this question; like those who love Israel and Israel's God, I have mourned over the scandal and the shame that your children are bringing upon you and upon this house, and now I have to warn you; I have seen it, and my vision of the night seems to confirm it. God's judgments are coming upon us all; the nation will be driven in flight before her foes, and you and yours must perish." Poor Eli! The older man knew the truth, the moral, irresistible, inevitable truth of what Samuel was saying, and the younger man, by speaking, had found his spiritual status and his work for God. There had been no open vision—how could there be in days like these?—up till now a silent Evan Roberts, a youthful St. Bernard, centuries before either, he stands out and tells the truth without waiting for human prompting: "Here am I; for thou didst call." As soon as it was borne in upon him that He who called was God and not man, he obeyed without hesitation the voice of conscience which spoke within him.

I do not believe that the words written down here as the lengthy speech of Jehovah to Samuel ever sounded in the sanctuary as my voice is

sounding at this moment ; but they had been spoken week by week and month by month in the heart of the listening, praying boy, now thoroughly roused when, as it seemed, all that had been working in his mind and heart came to a focus at the approach of a great national crisis. He goes forth to do the bidding of his conscience, which is the bidding of his God.

Now, brethren, if this is how the story shapes itself to you, let us see where the permanent value of the incident for us lies. I think it is in the likeness of Samuel's experience to yours and mine in our ordinary every-day life. God speaks to every listening ear and to every humble heart.

“Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking ?
Nor less I deem that there are powers
Which of themselves our minds impress,
And we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness.”

What I hope you will see with me is not how unlike this experience of Samuel's is to yours and mine, but how precisely similar it is. God speaks to you and me as really as ever He spoke to this youth, as certainly as He ever breathed His will in the susceptible heart of an Evan Roberts ; He is speaking in the City of London, and in this church this morning. The voice of God may come to your soul in any one of a thousand ways, but it

comes. It may come through the medium of another's personality; more emphatically and more likely it may come through your own and to yourself alone. I say, however, that it may come, often does come, by something which is external to your ordinary experience; but I want you to realise that the voice external, as we call it, is only a mode of the voice internal, after all. If a modern psychologist had hold of this story, and if he had true imaginative sympathy with it, as I have tried to explain it to you to-day, he would probably say all this was the working of a boy's sub-conscious mind. We know that those who see visions and hear voices, he would continue, in any age or generation, hear externally, as it were, that which is but the working of some force internal. Well, be it so, I am content. If any vision that an Evan Roberts ever saw was external, I know it is only his own visualised thought; but I also know that that may be the thought of God. There is in every man's heart an open door towards the eternal, and through that open door the messages of God can come, and what matters the symbol in which the thought is expressed? It is the Divine word—be it in the printed page, be it in the utterance of some preacher's voice which seems to you as the very echo of your own, or be it simply a whispered word that comes to your waiting heart from another that loves you—it is still the voice of God.

Recently I was pondering over a certain subject and a certain course of action, and someone, perhaps one of you, for anything I know, sent me by post a Scripture text. Probably you wanted me to preach from it, I cannot tell; no explanation was enclosed with it. Amongst all the number of letters of criticism, advice, and abuse I received on that particular morning, this text is the only one I can remember. No doubt the sender knew not all he was doing; he meant to supply me, probably, with something, as I have said, to preach from. To me it came as God's answer to what I was thinking; it seemed as if it was the very word for which one had been waiting; and you, commonsense Englishmen, would not accuse me of superstitious weakness in saying that I took it as what it was, a message from the loving Father, from the heart of God Himself. What had the sender to do with it? Almost nothing, but it was as much the voice of God to me as if it had pealed through this sanctuary, or, as if it had been that which called Samuel from his sleep, truly the voice of God within my own soul. There are people amongst us, living as it were day by day, hour by hour, even moment by moment, in the sanctuary, listening to the still, small voice; and some of them have played a great part in the history of our land. There is no more wonderful history in Christendom than the history of the Society of Friends. I am gratified that from

time to time some of those whom we familiarly call Quakers find their way in here; they come to listen to the voice of God as the preacher utters it. There is not one amongst such hearers but who would say he knows it when he hears it. Why? Because it is simply the speech of the Spirit within himself that has value for him. These men and women, who live their lives under the tuition of the Spirit, who wait for the still, small voice within their own souls, in the small things of life as in the great, are doing substantially what Samuel was doing, who spent his days and years in the sanctuary. God does speak to such waiting souls; and as the followers of George Fox have done wondrous things in the world, so have many humble souls, of whom the world never heard, but in whose hearts the voice of God can find a hearing. I have read but recently—perhaps you have read it too—the story of one of these men, John Bellows, a member of the Society of Friends, who felt himself called upon to interfere on behalf of the persecuted Stundists of Russia.* Imagine it: a poor Australian cobbler, I think he was; some very humble vocation, at any rate, was his. He read day after day, as you and I have done, of the sufferings of these servants of God in that perplexing country of Russia, until one day it seemed as if it were laid upon his heart

* John Bellows consented to be the colleague of the Australian. He himself was a man of position and influence in this country. The two together made the journey to Russia.

to try to interfere and to plead for them. Can you imagine anything more eccentric in outward seeming? This man crossed the sea, came to his brethren here, told them his story, went on to St. Petersburg, and, amazing as it may seem, pleaded the cause of the Stundists in the very presence of the Tsar. But there was this difference between him and many of those who do God's wonderful work in this world: he came home as simply as if he had been sent to buy potatoes, and never told anyone anything about what he had done. But from that hour, it is said, the sufferings of the Stundists were mitigated, and the poor Quaker was permitted to do what Christians of high degree had never succeeded in doing. A man in a far corner of the earth had heard the voice of God speaking within his own heart, and bidding him stand before a mighty ruler in the cause of righteousness. You say, why did God speak to such an one? Why not to someone nearer the Imperial throne? I do not know. Why did God speak to a Samuel and not to an Eli? Why was there no man of maturer years to come from the outer world and speak to the priest at the temple and tell him of the judgment on his house? Why, because God seeks the susceptible heart and the open door. It is according as we live that God comes; it is as we spend our days and our hours in the holy place, and our hearts are waiting and open, that we hear the voice

of God, and are conscious of the Holy One. As Samuel was prepared, so Samuel heard the voice, and as you and I live as it were in the presence of God, does God come to speak to us. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and hath exalted them of low degree."

Perhaps some of you might say that in teaching this I am venturing upon an unusual and even dangerous thing. There are people in the world with eccentric resolves, which they credit to the prompting of the Spirit of God. But, brethren, here is your safeguard: God never asks you to do anything that outrages the God-like reason he has given you; he has never set you upon the doing of any work that meant reversal of what He had set you to do before. God never contradicts Himself in your experience. If you are sent, as Samuel was sent, with a difficult commission, you will feel it within your own heart, so irresistibly urgent that you must speak; your whole nature, not merely a part of it, must speak. Samuel knew well that someone must voice the moral consciousness of Israel. God was saying so to the whole nation: he alone had the courage and the faith to act. Sometimes people have written to me saying that after long and earnest prayer they have been guided to place before me a certain situation, and that I am the person whom God has appointed to deal with it. Well, you know, I cannot help thinking that,

if that were so, God would have told *me*; for, consciously, one has not been acting as Eli, and I see no reason why some person at the ends of the earth should suddenly come, as it were, as God's messenger to me and bid me enter upon a new crusade that means the throwing down of all my work in this present sphere to which one has been called by the Divine voice. I notice very often that when such a person comes charged with a commission of that kind he himself is outside of it altogether; no sacrifice is demanded of him, no new departure, nothing but to come and say what has been laid upon his heart for another to perform. I do not feel that God very often, if at all, sends such messengers to His servants. What God does, as a rule, is to show as plainly as he showed to Samuel some burning need, some unmistakable moral issue, some choice to be made, some stand to be taken, in which we or someone else must act for Him. When such a moment arrives conscience and reason speak with the same tongue.

God may come to me with a word of comfort or peace from you, but when God comes to me to ask me to declare something which is difficult to declare, He will speak directly to His chosen messenger, through mind and heart together. It was not easy for Samuel, as a younger prophet speaking to an elder one, to tell Eli what was really a message to

all Israel, at a time when there was no open vision. It meant the beginning of a work for Samuel himself, a work in which he could not, dared not, spare himself, a work in which God would not spare him. When God came in vision to St. Paul, remember the terms in which the vocation was described to the prophet who was sent to him: "I will show him how great things *he must suffer* for My name's sake." When God lays a thing upon your heart to do, verily very often you will find that it means the giving up of something that is dear to your selfish nature, it means the fighting of a battle, it means the taking of a stand. God may come to you in the quick whispered warning of conscience, or He may come in the slow shaping of a great issue, but know, deep down in your heart of hearts, it involves some act of renunciation; it means that you are giving up yourself and your fond ambitions and your earthly dreams before you are able to say, "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth. Here am I, for thou didst call me."

Let me apply this great truth if I can in concrete fashion before we separate—this word of God which has been given to us. Supposing I am addressing this morning some employer who has left behind him in the counting-house those who depend upon him for daily bread and for advancement in the world, and amongst these, sir, there is one whom you have watched going wrong little by little.

It is no business of yours, of course; your relationship with him is simply a matter of pounds and shillings and pence; if he fails you, well, you can replace him, it is quite simple and easy. Is there nothing else? Sometimes your heart misgives you, as Samuel's must have done before the hour for action came. Have you no responsibility for that life and for the destiny that young man is making for himself? Is there nothing you can do? It may involve a certain sacrifice; it may mean an anxious watch; it may be that you will have to be his guardian from the door of infamy, the good angel who turns him back to the strait and narrow way. "Oh," you say, "if a man spent his time in looking after spendthrifts and *roués*, well, his life would be full of little else; what is more, in all probability, he would be a loser by the business." Quite so, that is the way God's messages often come. You know whether you are doing your duty or whether you are not. As certainly as God ever spoke to Samuel in the days of long ago, whether the voice was external or internal matters not a whit, God is speaking to you when He asks you to be a father to an erring lad, a friend to one who is weaker than yourself. This is the voice of God, and you may have heard it to-day, before ever you came near the preacher. If you have not, no preacher can make you hear it. Wherever you see a strong nature, God has given him to be a

steward of weaker ones, whether it be in business life or at home. We are not units, and we live not to ourselves—we are stewards one of another. Has God ever said to you that it might be your work to fling your arms of faith around another man's weakness, and turn it into strength? Has He ever said so? Deep down in your heart have you heard the still, small voice—or did it reverberate like thunder in the tones of some prophet? It is the voice of God, and your spiritual destiny depends, to a larger extent than you have dreamed, upon what you can say in response to that voice. Is it, "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth"?

Here again, it may be, is one who is a member of a family, upon whom the burdens of the rest have been placed. Up to now, you have stood between your brother and disgrace, and often as he has fallen your moral strength has rescued him; yet sometimes you get wearied of it. How little the noblest sacrifices that men are ever called upon to make are understood—how little! It is not only the outside world that remains ignorant (you are willing that that should be so), but those for whom you make them may not understand. My brother, when you did for a moment think of taking your own way, of studying your own interest, of steeling your heart, of doing no more for the guilty one, and bearing no more, what was it the voice within you said? "Your brother's

keeper"? Verily, and the Master who spoke to you twice before is speaking again, and He whose instrument you were, whose outstretched hand it is your privilege to be, is giving His commission once more. "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth. Thou didst call me."

Business men, are any of you in this position that you must act or be silent when a lie is enacted in your presence? Is there something shameful being done where your influence counts for something? "Oh," you say, hastily and nervously, "my influence counts for very little; there are ever so many people who ought to interfere before me; there are men I can name who stand so much higher than I do in worldly esteem, whose duty it is to speak the word and put forth the hand; let them do it." Are you quite comfortable in this attitude? Samuel might have spoken so the day before the final call. I say might—perhaps not. God is speaking now; you are a Samuel; go out, and take your stand and run your risk. It hurts—of course. Spiritual manhood is always bought at that price. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

THE SWORD OF THE LORD.

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.”—*Matthew x. 34.*

XVII.

THE SWORD OF THE LORD.

THIS is one of the best authenticated sayings of Jesus, by which I mean that it is one of those surprising, outstanding epigrams so characteristic of His way of teaching. He very commonly taught by paradox, and this is a paradox. Most New Testament critics are agreed that whatever may be said about the longer speeches of Jesus, here we have His own terse, forceful, original utterance. It will be remembered by all who read with interest and affection the words of the Master, that after all they are only reported speeches, and our Lord was dependent upon the memory of His faithful followers to reproduce what He said. Jesus never wrote a book, never wrote a line; when, therefore, we discuss the meaning of this saying or that, it is well that we should remember His method. Some of these utterances, the greater number in fact, are of such a kind, so terse, so forceful, so clear, that we cannot forget them, nor are we willing to do so, and we may take it for granted that wherever we meet such an epigram we are listening to the voice of Jesus. This is one.

Wherever else He speaks in the New Testament, He speaks here. What, then, may we ask, did He mean? "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

Before attempting to answer this question, I ought to remind you of some familiar comments upon the text. In the first place, then, it has been said that this is either a figurative and symbolical statement, or else it was utterly incongruous with the teaching of the Master. It has been said, often and often, that Jesus was inconsistent, or else His reporters were not careful to give what He actually said. Is this the same speaker who in the upper room on the eve of His betrayal, said: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"? The very same. I hope to show you that Jesus was by no means inconsistent, but that in the upper room the peace of heart which He promised to His followers was perfectly consistent with the tumult which His gospel was to excite in the world and with the strife that it was to cause. In the second place, it has been said that the meaning of our text is this: Those who seek to love and to follow Christ must be prepared to endure persecution in some form or other. Quite so. But this is not all that the text means. Still, I agree, it is a commonplace. It is self-evident that those who follow truth, those who seek to

serve God, those whose lives are consecrated to righteousness must be prepared, as has been so often said, to endure the consequences of their stand. It was Jesus who said: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye may have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation." But this explanation of our text is not borne out by the context; it is too obvious. If Jesus were to say—as in fact He did say in this very chapter—"It is enough for the disciple that he be as His Master, and the servant as his Lord"—He was not speaking merely of a passive reception of persecution, He was speaking of something else. "I am come," He said, "not to send peace on earth, but a sword"; or, stronger still in the original, "Think not that I come to cast peace on the earth, I came not to cast peace, but a sword." Who holds the sword? Who is to cast the sword? Who is to stir up the fight? Jesus Himself, and "the sword," whatever He means by it, is to be the "sword of the Lord," literally interpreted. This text, among many others, has been quoted in defence of religious wars, even wars of aggression. One of the stock arguments levelled against the religion of Jesus has been the amount of bloodshed it has caused. In this respect it has been compared with the religion of Islam, and contrasted with Buddhism. There is good ground for the comparison and for the contrast. Moham-medanism propagated itself by the sword, Chris-

tianity has not infrequently done the same. Buddhism has but little bloodshed to stain its record; the history of Christendom is a welter of it. When we look back along the nineteen centuries of its history, it is impossible not to be saddened by what official, representative, organised Christianity has done in the name of the Prince of Peace. There was an Order in the Middle Ages called the Knights Templars, fighting monks who wore the red cross on their breast and carried the sword by their side. These men were held to be representatives of the religion of Jesus, and their banners were blessed by Holy Church. Nor was all that they did evil, but who can acquit them—who can acquit the Church that endorsed their practices of cruelty and murder, lust and blood?

In 1572, on Black Bartholomew Day, the assassins who put tens of thousands of people to death in the name of religion, wore a white cross upon their shoulder or in their hat. The sword that they drew was said to be the sword of the Crucified. How do we feel about it now? The Thirty Years' War, which began in 1618 and ended in 1648—one of the most desolating that ever swept over Europe—was a religious war, in which Protestant and Catholic met throat to throat. The followers of Gustavus Adolphus and those of Wallenstein and Tilly adopted precisely the same motto, and shouted the same war cry: "The Sword of the Lord." What do we think about it now?

The Inquisition established in the Netherlands lent itself to stamping out the liberties of a people; it all but did it. The myrmidons of Alva made the same claim as Templars and Bartholomew assassins, and their banners were blessed by the Church, and it was held that theirs was the "Sword of the Lord." Remember, I am not censuring any particular section of the Church of Christ, most of the sections have been equally guilty, nor am I doing more than illustrate. Censure is hardly in place. What I wish you to ponder is this: How is it that the religion of the Prince of Peace has been held to be compatible with the religion of the sword? For so it has been, and the words of Jesus have been quoted in defence of the latter. We have now come to realise somehow that these developments of Christianity were foreign to the real spirit of Christ. He would have shuddered at the acts of the Knights Templars and the followers of Charles IX., the soldiers of Alva, or even of Gustavus Adolphus and Wallenstein. To-day, when we read the sentence which I have chosen as my text: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I am not come to send peace, but a sword," we may say they are prophetic words, but surely they could not represent the approval of Jesus for the practices of His Church.

In the Russo-Japanese War in one or two days, 80,000 people fell wounded or dead. One of those armies at any rate went into battle calling upon

the name of the Lord, and lost the day. But upon that same stricken field there came the ambulances of the Red Cross. We feel that the symbol adopted by the Templars belongs more properly to those who are binding up the wounds of the suffering and the dying on the battlefields of Asia to-day. Men, in practice, though it has taken them a long time to learn it, come nearer to the spirit of Christ when they use thus the symbol of the Cross. Are they any nearer when they employ the symbol of the sword? For here after all stands the text, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I am not come to send peace, but a sword," and we see what has been the history of Christendom in regard to it. Well, I will tell you what it means. It means that the Christian character is one which is positive, strong, insistent, aggressive; it never can be neutral in the presence of wrong. A merely negative attitude towards sin is not Christ-like, and never was. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I am not come to send peace but a sword."

This is why Christianity and Buddhism, for example, present such a contrast, as I have already hinted. Buddhism is negative where Christianity is positive, Buddhism places restraint upon individuality, Christianity calls for it to live itself out. Buddhism speaks of resignation, pessimism, despair; Christianity speaks of conformity to the will of God, serious optimism, defiance of the odds

of evil in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is why Christianity, organised Christianity, has so often gone wrong. It is so easy for that which is positive to develop a wrong spirit in taking a right side.

Nor am I prepared to say that the word "sword" is merely a figure of speech, and that the actual sword has never been drawn in the real service of Christ. I am not prepared to say it. I have listened to Nonconformist orators standing in this pulpit addressing cheering thousands with encomiums of old-time Puritanism, forgetting that Puritanism was a thing of blood and iron sometimes, and much of the time, too. Before they have finished their speech, as a rule, these same Nonconformist orators have, without discrimination, denounced the use of force in any form whatever, and in any century, or in any clime. They have appealed to a right sentiment, and they have appealed with conviction. It is not consistent, they would say, with the Spirit of Christ, to butcher men in cold blood. They were right if they referred to the spirit of modern wars, even that one to which I have already made reference, and the horror of which has moved the sympathy of British people thousands and thousands of miles from the scene of conflict. It was begun in a most cynical manner, and in a most covetous spirit. These two nations are struggling for a market. Old-time Puritanism never thought

about a market. It is written of the late Henry Ward Beecher, in his authorised biography, that when the terrible struggle began on the American continent, one of the most terrible in history between men of the same household, the same blood, speech and flag, he, the spokesman of the liberties of the slave, gave himself to moulding bullets, and when his sister came into the room to ask him why he was doing that, and for what purpose he was fashioning these messengers of death, his grim answer was, "To kill men!" The rifles that he paid for and sent to the front were labelled "Beecher's Bibles," and in the whole of the United States during that awful year the man who would have held back at the call of the colours when he was needed in defence of his country and of the liberties of the oppressed would have been rightly named a coward. There are times—they may come again—when the Christian man might have to stand out—I respect the convictions of the Quaker, who could not—the Christian man might have to stand out for truth, and peril his body and his life in doing it. If so, he draws the "Sword of the Lord," and not always in history has the sword been drawn in vain on the side of Christ.

But the principle of our text would still hold good, would still remain a Divine command, even if all swords had been beaten into plough-shares and all spears into pruning-hooks. The very victory of the Christ will do that by-and-bye in

days to come, which neither you nor I will live to see. Such a war as that now raging between Russia and Japan will be utterly impossible, for Christ will be the Victor, and yet there will remain in that day exactly what is fronting us now. There is not one amongst us but is called upon to accept a sword from the hands of Christ and enter the stricken field. I would fain show you all how this may be. Take church-going for example. It is a commonplace to say now that there is a decline in church attendance. It is a commonplace, but it is not wholly correct. I think I know a little too much of history to believe it. There is a temporary and comparative decline in church attendance, but if you will go back through the centuries of the history of this very country you can come upon times that were worse, and the only times that were better were when men were sent to Church at the sword point. I prefer these days to those. Perhaps, however, the pessimists are right who assert that in the temporary decline of church attendance the cause is to be sought in an indifference to the things of God. Perhaps, I say; i am not sure. More likely it is want of understanding of the true mission of the Church. The phrase "church-goer" is very objectionable. Church-goers may not be Christ's-doers. I am sometimes inclined to believe with Bishop Welldon that there are too many preachers nowadays. It is not preachers that we want; when God needs

them He sends them, and the people hear them, men cannot but hear them. But what we do want is that the churches should be camps, whence go forth the soldiers of the Lord carrying in their hands the fiery cross; every man in the camp in earnest for righteousness' sake, and prepared to do as well as to hear. This morning there is a great assembly met together as we say to worship. Not one-fifth of you came here to worship. You came here to listen to a sermon, and that is for the most part the spirit of church attendance everywhere in this nation. Comparatively few understand the simple worship of God, apart from what God's messenger has to say. Will we ever understand that what we as followers of Christ are asked to do is to put our hand to the plough or to cast the fire upon the earth, to wield the sword of righteousness in His great name? Church-goers, Christ-doers, listen to your Master. If you would know what the peace of God means, be prepared for war. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I am not come to send peace, but a sword."

Take again the private life of the people before me. Young man, what is it to be a Christ-like man? Does it mean that you are to seek to cultivate devotional feelings, abstain from fellowship with mankind, and prepare for heaven? I need hardly say that it does not. Many people come to me with a difficulty of this kind; it is so common that

I do not hesitate to refer to it. "How am I to feel that I possess God and that God possesses me? I have no consciousness, no sense of the presence of God." How many of you now in this congregation this morning feel like that? There are some of you, I doubt not, who do not want to find God, who, as a matter of fact, are conscious of no lack in not possessing Him. But there are others who with all their might desire Him. These latter shall have the experience. But let me tell you the way to it. Stop worrying about it, rise, take up the sword of the Lord, do something for righteousness' sake. "He that willeth to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." The one great thing that this age needs is a revival of moral earnestness, come how it may, not necessarily of devotional feelings, nor of what you call "the sense of God." The sense of God will come—surely come—along the line of high duty, the oblation of self upon the altar of holiness. "I am not come to send peace, but a sword." There has been sent to me a copy of a play running on the boards of a London theatre. It is called "The Prayer of the Sword," and the theme is somewhat on this wise. A young monk in a religious house in the year 1500 is represented as in colloquy with himself; he is discontented with the ideal to which he is committing his life. He begins to question whether it is the highest. The writer of the play seems to have in his mind—I do not say

that he had—that the monastic ideal was necessarily a lower one than that which he sets before the young monk or expresses in his words. It was not, you know. There were two monastic ideals. One was that described in Milton's phrase, "the fugitive and cloistered virtue"—that of the man who wished to escape the world's unpleasantnesses, and so betook himself behind stone walls, and led there the contemplative life. That was one way. But the true monastic ideal was never that, it was the ideal of men who were sick of the world's shams and vanities and pomps and cruelties and rewards, and fled from it, not to avoid it, but to serve it, and these men living together, a community of God, sought in the Spirit of Christ to serve the great community that would not listen to God. We want that monastic ideal back again, whether we have abbots and priors or no. And here is the way in which the dramatist makes the young monk to speak. He says to himself—

"Weary of sloth, weary of selfish peace,
Of useless blessedness ; sick with desire
For action that will smother Nature's cries,
And still the torturing consciousness of self.
Brother I long for some great enterprise,
Something to strive for or to overcome,
Some task that I may grapple with my hands,
With all my body and with all my soul."

This is the way in which he answers it to himself later on when the struggle has reached its crisis in his mind:—

"Thy destiny is written on the skies.

Arm thou the right ; let order's cause be thine :

Lead thou the slave of freedom ; guard the weak ;

Arise, and win the equal rights of man.

Lord, hear my soul that echoes this great call—

That I who work by prayer might pray by work ;

Work with the sword, pray with the sword, wage war

With prayer of sword, on all the powers of ill

That turn the world from thine eternal law."

Right, noble, good and true, Christ-like. You pray with your whole life, with your hand and with your heart, with your tongue and with your arm. He who would enter the service of the living God must be prepared for the consecration of all power and of all opportunity against the hosts of evil. You need not become a monk to serve the world ; serve it in the midst, in the name of Him who said : " Think not that I am come to send peace on earth : I am not come to send peace, but a sword."

To be a Christian, then, or—I would avoid the word—a Christ-like man, you must be humble and simple as a little child, unselfish, loving and sincere, but you must also be brave as a lion, and never shirk a moral issue when it comes. Do not prate about peace when there is no peace. The peace of God will come into the heart of man, who has no fear when he enters the service of the righteousness of God.

I would like to speak a helpful word to someone who has an unpleasant, perhaps even a sorrowful, task to face to-morrow. You have a loved one, it

may be, who has been doing and persisting in a wrong. Your love would shield him, you fain would save him from himself. But to do so means to strike him, and the sword that pierces him will go through your heart too.

A young fellow once came to me in trouble (I have told you this before), and when I asked him why he did not go with the story of his fault to his father, the answer was: "I could not do that yet. My father is one of the best men who ever lived, strong and true, but he would not let me off. I should have to put this right, and put it all right, and I cannot face him. I am not strong enough." That father, whom I never knew and never expect to know, is one of God's men. The sword where-with he would have pierced his boy had to pass through his own heart too. He could not spare because he belonged to Christ. This Christ, who pierced His own mother's heart, may have to say to you: "What hast thou to do with peace? Get thee behind me." "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I am not come to send peace, but a sword." It is easy enough to read this, when we go back to the days of Christian martyrdom. A St. Perpetua, on her way to execution, stopped in the street and entreated by her father to give him back his child, looks upon the kneeling figure, caresses the grey head with loving touch, and moves on to death. The twentieth century will say: "Well done," but the twentieth

century has not eyes to see that you, my brother, in your obscure corner, do exactly the same thing. But God, the speaker of the words of my text, has, all heaven has, and how do you know how much heaven can see? "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I am not come to send peace, but a sword."

Here is a lad again, it may be, who feels himself under the necessity of taking a semi-public stand to-morrow against practices in the presence of which he has hitherto kept silence. You have condoned them by your silence, in your business house, where other fellows are lying and cheating, and seeking to live the life of the beast, and encouraging one another in doing it. Men somehow descend to meet—they are like mountain peaks. Every one of those men knows in his heart, as well as you know, that he is doing wrong, but persists in it, encouraged by the presence of the rest, terrorised by them. This poor coward of the darkness is very blustering and brave in the light. What will you do? You are going to a task to which you are not equal, or feel you are not equal, but God is sending you to it. No brag, no bluster will serve you. What you have to do is to dissociate yourself entirely, cost what it may, from the practices of your community. Take your own stand, take it quietly, for you are not so much alone as you suppose. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I am not come to

send peace, but a sword." You have to use yours by the very stand you take, but you do not take it alone, the Christ stands there too. There are some relationships in life which obedience to conscience may shatter to pieces. The best and the nearest may fail to understand. The temptation is to take the easy way. Do not take it. Take God's way; you will never be left in any doubt as to what it is. I will tell you what God has bid me say to you: Fear not to strike a loving blow for Christ, though your own heart be bleeding in doing it. See, there lies at your feet the sword which Christ has cast upon the earth. You are called into the ranks of the soldiers of the Lord. There is a service for you to render, a work for you to do. It is a great campaign in which we are engaged, nothing less than winning the whole wide world from sin and sorrow and pain to righteousness, peace and God. It is no doubtful issue, it is that God's righteousness is pitted against ignorance, error and wrong, and God's righteousness must prevail.

"The day of the Lord is at hand, at hand,
His storms roll up the sky,
The nations sleep starving on heaps of gold,
All dreamers toss and sigh.
Who would sit down and sigh for a lost age of gold
While the Lord of all ages is here?
True hearts will leap up at the trumpet of God,
And those who can suffer can dare.
Each old age of gold was an iron age, too,
And the meekest of saints may find stern work to do
In the day of the Lord at hand."

